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Alcutta

## GANDHI'S SECOND RISE TO POWER

*Indian Politics—1924 to 1929\**

AMALES TRIPATHI

I would like to confine this paper to one segment of Mahatma Gandhi's rich and varied life—that between 1924 and 1929, and put an emphasis on the British policy—mainly that of Reading and Irwin, which helped Gandhi's second rise to power.

Reading had ably overridden the first upsurge of the Indian people against the Raj. One of his strategies was to keep the Moderates on his side. He had decided to avoid wounding their prickly conscience about individual liberties as long as possible.<sup>1</sup> "... prevention by agreement and expressions of regret, etc., in this case of Mr. Gandhi's (sic), is better than arrest and prosecutions", he had commented at the time of his Simla interviews with Gandhi.<sup>2</sup> He had stuck to this policy even under mounting pressure from the Governors of the major provinces.<sup>3</sup> Though repressive measures were taken in Bengal after the hartal of 17 November, 1921, the date of the landing of the

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\*Gandhi lecture, 1974, delivered at School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in collaboration with Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi. I am grateful to Sir C. H. Philips, Vice-Chancellor, London University, for help and advice.

1 For controversy over policy in 1920 and 1921 see D. A. Low, 'The Government of India and the first non-cooperation movement in 1920-22' in R. Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 298-323. See especially, Home Dept's letter to local govts, 28 Jan. 1921 and Home Pol. 3 and K.G.W., Deposit (Print), July 1921.

2 Reading to Montague, Montagu Coll., Eur. Mss D 523 (NAI), vol. 14, p. 12.

3 Willingdon (Governor of Madras) to Reading, 3 April 1921, Reading Coll., Eur. Mss. E 238 (microfilm, J.N.M.M.L.), vol. 23, pp. 3-4; 27 Feb. 1922, *ibid.* vol. 24, pp. 194-95.

George Lloyd (Governor of Bombay) to Reading, 22 Aug. 1921, *ibid.* vol. 22, pp. 262-63; 5 Jan. 1922, *ibid.* vol. 24, pp. 13-14 and 14 Feb. 1922, *ibid.* p. 108.

Harcourt Butler (Governor of U.P.) to Reading, 12 Jan. 1922, *ibid.* vol. 24, p. 122.

Prince of Wales, the Governor General was afraid that the Moderates, restive over mass arrests of the Congress leaders and volunteers, might go over to the enemy.<sup>4</sup> The Home Department did not believe that the time for "a declaration of war to the knife" had arrived. Reading's hint to Malaviya of a possible improvement of the constitutional machinery (as the result of a Round Table Conference<sup>5</sup>) was a clever bait not only taken by the Moderates but by some of the leading lights of the Congress, like C. R. Das and A. K. Azad. It took the Secretary of State by complete surprise. "We cannot see", he asked, "how is it possible to stop such a conference developing into a simple demand for swaraj . . ."<sup>6</sup> The Governors opposed the move and the Cabinet at home disapproved.<sup>7</sup> But Reading rightly guessed that the hope of a constitutional advance might neutralise the non-cooperators while keeping the Moderates in line at the time of the Prince's visit to Calcutta. What more, he expected Gandhi to throw a spanner into the works by putting up harsh terms.

"In the struggle with Gandhi", noted the Home Secretary on 19 January 1922, "the fight has always been a fight for position . . . In November and December last the tactical advantage passed for a time to Gandhi. During the present month moderate opinion has shown distinct sign of veering round in favour of government. Their leaders have been alienated by the arrogant attitude recently taken up by Gandhi and his associates, and tendency to condemn the action recently taken by Government has distinctly weakened." The Viceroy's prognostication had come true. Gandhi had refused to suspend picketing during the Round Table Conference. He had demanded not only the release of Satyagrahis imprisoned under the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Seditious Meetings Act but also of the Khilafatist and the Fatwa prisoners.<sup>8</sup> The Ahmedabad Congress rejected Reading's offer. At the All Parties Conference (Bombay,

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4 Reading to all Governors, 19 Dec. 1921, Low, op. cit., fn. 4, pp. 308-9.

5 In a tel. of 18 Dec. 1921 to Montagu, Reading writes of an "advancing on the road to the ultimate goal of dominion status." There were four telegrams on this—15, 16, 17 and 18 Dec. 1921.

6 Montagu to Reading, tel. 20 Dec 1921.

7 Reading to Montagu, tel. 24 Dec. 1921; Home Pol., K.W. to 89/1922. Same to same, 5 Jan 1922, Reading Coll., op cit., asks for Cabinet permission if the situation turns more favourable.

8 G. of I. Home Pol., no. 89, pt I, 1922, App., *ibid.* no. 201/1923. The Prince was to arrive at Calcutta on 24 December. Malaviya was in touch with the Viceroy and Gandhi from the beginning of November. Reading to Montagu, 11 Nov. 1921, Reading Coll., op. cit. Malaviya visited Das.

14 January 1922) Gandhi took up an intransigent attitude. With the Prince's visit safely over, Reading, who seems to have never been serious about the dominion status offer,<sup>9</sup> found less use in continuing it. Not only the Moderates had been alienated but Das, Azad, etc. were annoyed by Gandhi's negative tactics. As Subhas Chandra Bose records, "The chance of a life time, he (Das) said, had been lost." The Bardoli decision to suspend civil disobedience (12 February 1922) alienated Lajpat of Punjab, Kelkar and Moonje of C.P., and the Nehrus of U.P. The Governor General did not act even upon the Secretary of State's directive of 6 February or the decision of the majority of the Executive Council on 13 February to arrest Gandhi. He had to make sure of the disruptive effect of the Bardoli resolution on the Congress organization before he could deal the *coup de grace*. And he had to keep the Indian members of the Executive Council on his side<sup>10</sup>

The postponement was fortunate. Gandhi's influence was waning considerably which "to some extent accounts for the calmness which has reigned since his arrest".<sup>11</sup> Any precipitate action, Reading commented later, would have led to the revival of the movement, "and a situation might well have arisen, in which the constitution

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Azad, etc in Alipur Jail with Reading's message. They contacted Gandhi on 19 December. Malaviya himself wired on 20th. Gandhi gave his terms to Malaviya on the same day and to Das and Azad on 19th. Reading saw Moderate delegates on 21st. "I always doubted strongly", he writes to Montagu on 28th, "whether Malaviya and his friends would succeed in getting the only assurance I could have regarded as satisfactory from Gandhi and the other leaders, . . . But all this is now beyond the range of practical politics as Gandhi has now declared a war of civil disobedience" But it had steadied moderate opinion "which was very much on the run to non-cooperation". Reading to Montagu, 28 Dec. 1921, Reading Coll., op cit. See Malaviya to Gandhi 16 Dec 1921 and tel. 20 Dec. 1921; Das and Azad to Gandhi, 19 Dec. 1921; Gandhi to Das and Azad, 19 Dec 1921; Gandhi to Malaviya, 20 Dec. 1921. See also M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, (Asia 1958), vol. 1, 1873-1922 pp. 505-8; P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Congress*, vol. II pp. 221-22; Maulana A. K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Cal. 1959), pp. 17-18; Krishna Das, *Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi*.

9 "I should have never gone into it (conference) except after public utterance to the effect that at present I was against extension of the reforms as I thought the time had not yet come". Reading to Montagu, 16 Feb. 1922, Reading Coll., op. cit.

10 Sapru to Reading, 13 Feb. 1922, Sapru Mss., National Library, Cal. vol. XXII; Reading to Montagu, tel. 14 Feb. 1922; also Reading to Mantagu, 16 Feb. 1922, op. cit.

11 Reading to Peel, 20 April 1922, *ibid*.

could no longer have been worked . . . we should have been confronted with the necessity either of making sweeping concessions or of governing by sheer force, and without the cooperation by the Indian people . . .”<sup>12</sup> Still later : “The arrest of Gandhi in the heyday of his popularity would have been disastrous, for the spirit of sacrifice, always prevalent in India, had been aroused to the extent that men would willingly have given their lives”.<sup>13</sup>

Reading's second strategy was to sow dissension between Hindus and Muslims by setting the Congress and the Khilafatists at logger-heads. He had realised early that the application of high religious and moral values to politics would lead to Gandhi's acceptance of “many with whom he is not in accord”, and “this is particularly true of the Hindu-Muslim combination which I think rests upon insecure foundations”.<sup>14</sup> He exploited Gandhi's annoyance over Mohammad Ali's violent speeches. He requested him during the Simla interviews (May, 1921) to persuade Ali to apologise. The motive comes out clearly in a contemporary letter to his son. “He (Md. Ali) is a real factor in the situation”, Reading wrote, “he is the ostensible link between Mahommedan and Hindu. If trouble comes between him and Gandhi, it means the collapse of the bridge over the gulf between him and the Hindus and Mahommedans. If Mohammad Ali does what Gandhi desires—and that no doubt will be to make the declaration—Mohammad Ali will be lowered in the public esteem; his position as a leader will be seriously impaired and the most disturbing factor of peace at the moment will be quietened.”<sup>15</sup> Reading did something more than lowering Ali's prestige. By deliberate fabrication of Gandhi's promises of future conduct of Alis, he annoyed Gandhi but ensured mistrust between Gandhi and Mohammad Ali.<sup>16</sup> Gandhi refused to attend the Karachi Conference of the Khilafatists in July.

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12 Viceroy to Secy. of State, tel. 7 June 1922, Home Pol., 410/II/1922.

13 Reading to Birkenhead, 1 Jan. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., Eur. Mss. D 703/1-47 (microfilm, N.A.I.).

14 Reading to Montagu, 19 May 1921, Reading Coll., op. cit., vol. 3, p. 32.

15 (2d) Marquess of Reading, *Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading* (Lond. 1945), pp. 199-200. See also text of Ali's apology in Viceroy to S. of S, tel. 30 May, 1921; Montagu to Reading, 1 June, 1921, Reading Coll., op. cit.

16 Reading to Montagu, 7 and 14 July 1921, Reading Coll., op. cit. See text of agreed statement of Gandhi—*Reading* talks in Viceroy to S. of S tel. 2 Aug 1921., *ibid.* Md. Ali denied that this was an apology to Government. See copy of M. Ali to Dr. A. H. Said, May, encl Montagu to Reading, 22 Dec 1921, *ibid.*

Reading deliberately provoked misunderstanding between the two communities by allowing the Moplah revolt to develop and preventing the nationalist leaders from intervening and by arresting the Ali brothers, while keeping Gandhi free, for the same offence of preaching boycott of military service.<sup>17</sup> Since Gandhi's movement, in his view, "could never have gained its strength but for the Treaty of Sevres", he had been writing as early as 23 June 1921, "I . . . do most earnestly hope, for the sake of our position in India, that we shall not be driven into supporting the Greeks".<sup>18</sup> He had received a Mahomedan deputation on the same day and, by early November, even moderate Muslim leaders, like Muhammad Shafi, began to press for a revision of the treaty. Shafi's memorandum<sup>19</sup> prayed for restoration of Smyrna and Thrace to Turkey and recognition of the Caliph's suzerainty over the holy places of Islam, which, if effected, would be "also the remedy for the dangers of non-cooperation movement in India" as it would cause an immediate split between the Swarajists and the Khilafatists. Reading fully endorsed Shafi's plan.<sup>20</sup> It was the permission for publication of the Government of India's telegram of 28 February 1922 on these lines<sup>21</sup> that brought about Montagu's

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17 M. Ali was arrested for his Karachi speech (of 10 July) in September 1921. Gandhi repeated the speech at Trichi on 19 Sept. CW. vol. 21 p. 148. It was followed up by manifesto of 4 Oct. 1921, *ibid.*, pp. 235-6. For arrest of Ali brothers and Gandhi's reiteration of the same manifesto, see Reading to Montagu, 25 Aug., 29 Sept. and 6 Oct. 1921. Reading Coll., *op. cit.*; Montagu to W. Davison, 9 Nov. 1921 and Montagu to Reading, 10 Nov. 1921, Montagu Coll. (Microfilm, N.A.I.). Montagu pleaded "a very special difficulty" in explaining the difference in treatment. He was afraid that any explanation would serve the extremist purpose of getting an indication of the Governments' plans. Reading thought that, by repeating Md. Ali's speech, "Gandhi evidently is anxious to satisfy the Mahomedans that he wishes to stand with the Ali brothers, for there are rumours already that it is they who are being prosecuted whereas he is being left free." While Gandhi was determined to be arrested, Reading hesitated to cause trouble on the eve of the Prince's visit. Bombay govt was against arrest. So was Sapru. Reading to Montagu, 29 Sept. and 6 Oct., 1921, *op. cit.*

18 Reading to Montagu, 23 June 1921, Reading Coll., *op. cit.* He had said the same thing to Lloyd George before coming out to India. Montgomery Hyde, *Lord Reading*, pp. 331-32. Also Reading to Peel, 26 July 1923, Reading Coll., *op. cit.*

19 Md. Shafi's Memo, dated 2 Nov. 1921, encl. Reading to Montagu, 3 Nov. 1921, Reading Coll., *op. cit.*

20 Reading to Montagu, 11 Nov. 1921, *ibid.*

21 It concluded . . . "So important it is for the Government of India to range itself openly on the side of Moslem India that we press for permission to publish the foregoing . . . forthwith" This tel. was followed by another more pressing on 4 March 1922. M. Hyde, *op. cit.*, pp. 371-72

resignation. No better proof could be offered of the Government of India's championship of the Muslim interest.<sup>22</sup> The response of Muslims as far apart as Md. Shafi and Abdul Bari and Hasrat Mohani was immediate.<sup>23</sup> The timing of the publication of the telegram (two days before Gandhi's arrest) is significant. Reading's correspondence with Peel throughout September-November 1922 breathe an anxiety about the Turkish peace terms. "I assure you", he wrote on 5 October, "that I often wonder how we should have managed during this year if it had not been for the belief of the prominent and influential Moslems that I myself as Viceroy and my Government, were doing all we possibly could to make Indian Moslem opinion prevail in English Government circles".

The Viceroy's machinations alone do not explain why Gandhi's first movement began with a bang but ended in a whimper. The inherent tensions of a pluralist society came to the surface as non-cooperation churned India's political life. The small western educated Muslim elite, led by Shafi, Jinnah and Aga Khan, was unwilling to throw its future into the melting pot of Khilafatism. Gandhi relied on the Ali brothers, Ansari and Abdul Bari as link men. But they, in their turn, had perforce to rely on orthodox Muslim divines, whose influence, already receding before western education, got a new lease of life to strengthen the waning trend of obscurantism and separatism. Gandhi preferred to overlook that Khilafat was an irrelevant issue for the Indians (" . . . if I were not interested in the Indian Mohammedans I would not interest myself in the welfare of the Turks anymore than I am in that of the Austrians or the Poles . . . If I deem the Mohammedan to be my brother it is my duty to help him in his hour of peril to the best of my ability, if his cause commends itself to be just"<sup>24</sup>), that it was

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22 Reading to Peel, 13 July 1922, Reading Coll., op. cit.

23 See Md. Shafi's note, 20 April 1922, encl. Reading to Peel, 26 April 1922. Bari's letter to Shafi expressed gratitude. He wired to Central Khilafat Committee (Bombay) and Bengal Khilafat Committee to stop all agitation. "What astonished me was Hasrat's attitude. He was for dropping non-cooperation altogether", writes Abdullah Khan to Muhammad Shafi, 15 March 1923, Home Pol., March 1922. Shafi ends his note with the conviction that modification of the Turkish peace terms "will break the back of the non-cooperation movement". He was right. About three quarters of political prisoners were Muslims. "When word was passed to this turbulent Mahommedan community to cease from demonstrations and disturbances the more peaceful era began . . ." Reading to Peel, 13 July 1922, Reading Coll., op. cit.

24 Gandhi, 'Khilafat : Further Questions Answered', *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Govt. of India), vol. 17, p. 475. See also 'Why I have joined the Khilafat Movement', *Young India*, 28 April 1920

becoming an anachronism<sup>25</sup> of which the Young Turks were sick and from which the Arabs and the Armenians sought release, that Pan-Islamism was unrealistic and might deflect Indian Muslims from a straight fight with imperialism on political and economic grounds and that it postponed development of secular, scientific attitudes among the Muslim elite itself.<sup>26</sup> For him it was simply a *quid pro quo* for acceptance of non-cooperation against the Government. Sad to see the Poona Pact, his handiwork, scuttled under an effervescent, pseudo-religious, emotional tidal bore, Jinnah predicted that the government would offer the Muslims a better deal than Gandhi any day.

While the extra-nationalist Khilafat demands alienated many Hindus, the Liberals (or Moderates) were alienated by Gandhi's refusal to accept Malaviya's proposal for a Round Table Conference in December 1921 and his insistence on impossible terms at the All Parties Conference in January 1922. The Viceroy's withdrawal of the offer of a constitutional advance was squarely laid at the door of Gandhi.

The movement lacked a sense of purpose which could mould a strategy of symbolic action. Unlike in South Africa there was no specific law to be broken.<sup>27</sup> If the restoration of the Caliphate was an irrelevant demand, the talk of Ramraj had a revivalist tone. It held no clear promise for the Indian peasantry or the working class or the lower castes roused after an eternity of inertia. Agrarian non-cooperation could never be integrated into political non-cooperation as Gandhi's elitist followers fought shy of the former's implications for their class interests. Gandhi had himself put a damper on Guntoor and was soon to abandon Bardoli after several postponements. The basic conflicts could not be wished away. Energy was frittered on swadeshi and boycott but little preparations for mass civil disobedience were made.

Gandhi found the Hindu society divided into innumerable caste pyramids with distinct social and cultural values. He hoped that he could unite them in a mass movement by relating political aspirations to moral, instead of material, objects. The religious idiom failed

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25 Chowdhry Khaliqzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore 1969), pp. 68-69. Lajpat Roy came to the same conclusion. See V. C. Joshi (ed.), *Lala Lajpat Rai, Writings and Speeches*, vol. II, pp. 181-82, and Indulal Yajnik, *Gandhi as I Knew Him*, pp. 129-30.

26 Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims* (Vikas, 1975) pp. 351-54.

27 Simone Panter—Brick, *Gandhi contre Machiavel* (Paris 1963), pp. 86 et seq.

to paper back the cracks. In Bihar, for example, besides the Hindu-Muslim controversy over *kurbani*, the rivalry between Kayasthas and Bhumihar Rajputs and that between the upper castes and *goalas* stood in the way of concerted resistance. The non-Brahmin opposition put a brake on Guntoor as much as Gandhi's squeamishness about fulfilment of conditions for a no-tax campaign. There were doubts on all sides—Khilafatist doubts about Hindu loyalty and Hindu doubts about Muslim loyalty, especially in the context of the Moplah revolt. The writings of Sraddhanand and Keshav Hedgewar reflect this. While Bepin Pal, Rabindranath and Andrews shied away from the none too covert violence of the movement as it gathered momentum, the erstwhile revolutionaries and left-wingers became disillusioned about the efficacy of non-violence. Gandhi was weakened by the persistent violent stance of the Ali brothers, not to speak of countless others, who perpetrated the November riots in Bombay. Chauri-chaura was the last straw on the camel's back. It was the Khilafat and Congress workers, not a mob, who were turning violent.<sup>28</sup> His statement before the judge was a *cri de coeur*. It breathes through every line an agony of despair. "I have now a more vivid sense of truth and of my own littleness than I had a year ago". Reading was waiting for this moment. "He had pretty well run himself", Reading confided to his son, "to the last ditch as a politician, when he ran the gamut of open defiance of government with a challenge of all authority fixed for a certain day, and when the day arrived he went to the opposite extreme and counselled suspension of the most acute activities. This of course caused dissensions amongst his followers . . ."<sup>29</sup> From dissension "disintegration and disorganisation set in, enthusiasm evaporated, disillusionment and discouragement prevailed in the ranks of the party." Reading ordered Gandhi's arrest more than a month after Bardoli, so that not even "the crown of thorns" would be left for him. Uneasily placed between "the diabolical crimes of Chauri-chaura or the mad outrage in Bombay and Madras" and "intense indignation at the misdeeds of the government", Gandhi welcomed his long spell of imprisonment with a sigh of relief.<sup>30</sup>

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"You must govern India in all its aspects", Montagu advised Chelmsford, "as a country on its way to self-government and not as

28 *Young India*, 19 June 1924, 29 Oct. 1925.

29 (2d) Marquess of Reading, op. cit., p. 249.

30 "I enjoy boundless peace". Gandhi to M. Trikumji, 13 March 1922, C.W., vol. 23, p. 94.



a dependency unless all work you and I are doing is to be a sham".<sup>31</sup> He desired a close relationship between the executive and the legislature, to turn the Liberals "from opposition back—benchers to Government back—benchers by quiet and informal talk. . .".<sup>32</sup> He called for a spirit of accommodation and a larger measure of Indianisation. "We have got to recognise that self-government does not merely mean political reform, but the substitution of an indigenous administration for a foreign administration".<sup>33</sup>

The Liberals had agreed to work the reforms in their belief that, although their suggestion for the introduction of dyarchy at the centre had not been accepted, Montagu would offer opportunities for further advance early. Busy and elderly men of the well-to-do class, mostly eminent lawyers, businessmen and landlords, whom Jawaharlal sarcastically described as "bourgeoisdom *in exelsis* with all its pedestrain solidity", the Liberal leaders were incapable of the rough and tumble of nationalist politics of the new generation, which, moreover, they considered to be merely destructive. They were astute lawyers themselves, and the nationalist press and the Congress propaganda need not have dinned the defects of the Reforms into their ears. But they would not look the gift horse in the mouth. They put their faith in the Montagu spirit, which blew gently at the beginning. They began by striking a blow for individual liberty (freedom of assembly, freedom of the press), Indianisation of the army and racial equality before law—all shibboleths of the old, Moderate Congress. On Srinivasa Sastri's resolution a Repressive Laws Committee recommended repeal of such laws except the Indian Criminal Law (Amd.) Act Part II of 1908 and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1911. At Tej Bahadur Sapru's instance<sup>34</sup> the Press Act was repealed. On a Liberal motion the Home Member expressed regret for abuses of the martial law administration in Punjab.<sup>35</sup>

The Liberals persuaded the government to accept the recommendations of the Esher Committee in a modified form. Progressive Indianisation of the commissioned ranks was sanctioned and a promise

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31 Montagu to Chelmsford, 8 Aug. 1919, Chelmsford Papers, Eur. Mss. E. 264, vol. 5, p. 90. "But if you carry Government of India a la O'Dwyer sooner or later, you must reap a reward of the kind O'Dwyer reaped". Montagu to Chelmsford, 1 April 1920, Montagu Coll., op cit.

32 Montagu to Reading, 1 March 1922, Reading Coll., op. cit.

33 Same to same, 21 July 1921, *ibid*.

34 Home Pol., Sec., no. 4, pt. I, 1921.

35 Leg. Ass. Deb., vol. I of 1921, pp 61-78.

given that the defence obligation of India should not in future be more onerous than those of the Dominions.<sup>36</sup> A bill was passed in 1923 to undo the injustice of the Ilbert Bill compromise.

Harmony began to disappear as the local governments mounted pressure on the Governor General for stern measures against the non-cooperators. The Ali brothers were arrested against the advice of Sapru,<sup>37</sup> who rightly expected Gandhi to reiterate the Khilafat resolution passed at Karachi (in July 1921).<sup>38</sup> The Liberals did not like the special powers conferred by the Government of India on the local executives (on 24 November 1921) during the visit of the Prince of Wales.<sup>39</sup> Reading dissipated the good will created by his consent to Malaviya's proposal for a Round Table Conference when the Home Government's opposition came to be known.

The spirit went out of the reforms after Montagu had to resign for allowing the publication of the Government of India's despatch of 28 February 1922, asking for modification of the Treaty of Sevres. Montagu's successor, Lord Peel, was a very different man, with neither Montagu's knowledge of India nor his faith in liberalism. The Liberals had hoped to attain Dominion Status after a short period of transition. But now they feared a reaction.<sup>40</sup> The fear was substantiated when Peel refused to act on a unanimous resolution of Legislative Assembly (29 September 1921) recommending to the Governor General-in-Council to convey to the Secretary of State its view that the progress made by India on the path of responsible government warranted a reexamination and revision of the constitution at an earlier date than 1929. Since this resolution was drafted with the advice of Sir William Vincent and Sir Malcolm Hailey after they had resisted J. N. Majumdar's far more drastic resolution for full responsible government for the provinces and transfer of all subjects, except defence, foreign and political relations, to responsible Ministers at the centre in 1924 and full dominion self-government in

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36 Ibid pp. 182-97 and pp. 1683-1762

37 Sapru to Vincent, 9 Oct. 1921, Home Pol, Sec. no. 303/1921; Sapru to Reading, 13 Feb. 1922, Reading Coll, vol 24, pp 105-7

38 Sapru to Vincent, 16 Aug. 1921, Home Pol., 155/1922.

39 Manifesto of the National Liberal League, *The Statesman*, 17 Dec. 1921 Also Reading to Vincent, tel. 17 Dec. 1921, Home Pol 201/VI/1922.

40 C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, 'Edwin Montagu A Personal Tribute', *Indian Review*, 1925, vol. 26, pp. 372-5. But Montagu was not prepared to grant further concessions till the electorate had been fully educated to its work and responsibility. Till then, however able and selfless the political leaders might be, "they could not save themselves from exercising it (power) as bureaucrats." Montagu to Reading, 6 July, 1921, Reading Coll., op. cit.

1930, Peel went against the Government of India as well as the demand of the National Liberal Federation.<sup>41</sup> The situation worsened with Lloyd George's 'Steel Frame' speech on 2 August 1922, which, in Reading's words, "... has upset things tremendously here".<sup>42</sup> Liberal stalwarts, like Kunzru, Dwarkadas, Samarth, etc., were furious at Reading's half-hearted attempt to defend the Prime Minister.<sup>43</sup> Sapru felt so depressed that he thought of resigning.<sup>44</sup> Relations were further strained by the Government's proposal to introduce legislation to prevent dissemination of disaffection against the Indian States. Motion for leave to introduce it was refused (45-41) but the Governor General certified it. It was his first exercise of special powers under the new act.

The British Government turned down a scheme of the Government of India for the complete Indianisation of the army within 35 years. The War Office opposed a slight reduction of the British personnel on the ground of economy which even the C-in-C. considered safe. The Liberals took umbrage when a Royal Public Services Commission (under the chairmanship of Viscount Lee of Fareham) was announced on 25 January, 1923 to examine the position and prospects of the superior services but leaving aside the question of further Indianisation. Out of 1400 civil servants only 160 odd were Indians.<sup>45</sup> Reading warned in this connection that Indians would ask, "if it is proposed to induce British youths to enter the I. C. S. and also to make arrangements for further Indianising the services, what is the period to which India is to look for her responsible self-government and, it will be argued, on this must depend the deter-

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41 See Leg. Ass. Deb., 1921, vol. II, pp. 1282-6 and *Report of the National Liberal Federation of India*, 1921, p. 11. For Peel's despatch on Reforms, 2 Nov. 1922, see Parl. Papers, H.C., vol. 18, 1923, p. 881. In fact, the non-cooperation movement had alienated British public and Parliamentary opinion against grant of further reforms. See Montagu to Reading, 1 and 16 Feb. 1922, Reading, Coll. op. cit.

42 Reading to Peel, 31 Aug. 1922, *ibid* vol. 5, p. 127. Two things, the Viceroy wrote, disturbed the Indian public—"the term 'experiment' much emphasized in reference to the Reforms, and the second, the inference that British Civil Service was always to form part of any future government of India and consequently, that complete self-government seems negated by the P.M.'s observations." Same to same, 17 Aug. 1922, *ibid*.

43 *The Leader*, 13, 14, 23, 24, and 26 Aug. 1922.

44 Reading to Peel, 12 Aug. 1922, Reading Coll., op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 181-82.

45 Memorandum on the Disability of Indians in the Indian Civil Service encl. in Montagu to Reading, 15 Aug. 1921; Montagu Coll., op. cit.

mination regarding the services. Will it be ten, twenty, thirty, or even forty years before India obtains fuller responsible self-government?"

The ruffled Liberal feelings were registered in attacks on the central budget and repeated demands for retrenchment. They refused to vote more than twenty crores in new taxes, especially resisted the Salt Tax and the Cotton Excise Duty, and reduced several grants. The dispute over the enhancement of Salt Tax was bitter and prolonged. When the Assembly had refused it in 1922, Peel had ordered certification. In the context of the non-cooperation movement Reading had opposed such a procedure. Balancing of the budget could not be postponed next year. Each province was in deficit and demanded reduction of the provincial contribution. The India Government argued that, with the decline of the prices of foodstuff relatively to wages, a higher duty on salt would be less oppressive. When the Liberals protested, Hailey and Blackett met their arguments with haughty and threatening rebuttals.<sup>46</sup> The Assembly threw out the doubled salt duty (59-44) but the Council of State revised its decision and fixed the duty at Rs. 2-8as per annum. When the revised duty came before the Assembly, the Liberals cited hostile public opinion to throw it out for the second time (58-47). Unaccommodating this time, the Governor General certified the tax till 31 March, 1924. Purely administrative considerations having outweighed liberal susceptibilities, the majority sought to restrict the scope of the power of certification. Hailey and Blackett displayed an offensive attitude again.<sup>47</sup> The Liberals left disgruntled when the Assembly was dissolved.

They met with no better luck with the provincial executives though they needed all possible help against the tactics of the non-cooperators. Finance was no swaddling clothes but a strait jacket for the infant called 'dyarchy'. In 1922 there was a deficit of £8 million in a country the national income of which was £88 million. The budget, wrote Reading, "has hung like a black cloud over me". The financial stringency was further heightened by the post-war slump and an unwise currency policy. The Meston Award made matters bleaker for the provinces. Contributions from the provinces for balancing central expenditure meant new taxes or heavy retrench-

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46 Leg. Ass. Deb., 1923, vol. 3, pt. 4, pp. 3752-54, 3762-65, 3770-75, 3807-12.

47 Ibid., pt. 5, pp. 4301-38, 4451-502.

ments on the developmental side which belonged to the transferred half and was now managed by inexperienced ministers.<sup>48</sup>

Meston had been most unkind to Bengal. She had been deprived of half of the income tax proceeds and the whole of the jute tax. Charges had, on the other hand, risen on account of reorganisation of the higher services and the special machinery set up under the Reforms.<sup>49</sup> The ministers had to start the first year of their three year term of office with a deficit budget, and they were prevented from resigning by the Finance Member, Sir John Kerr.<sup>50</sup> Ronaldshay, the Governor of Bengal, recognised the peril: "if the present financial settlement is allowed to stand . . . the whole delicately poised structure of reforms constitution in Bengal would be shaken from top to bottom".<sup>51</sup> But even after a discussion with the deputation under Kerr and knowing that the deficit on ordinary administration alone amounted to one crore and thirty lakhs, Reading could not dispense with the nine or ten crores the Centre obtained from Bengal on the plea that it would be favouritism.<sup>52</sup> Only a remission of 63 lakhs was granted for three years.<sup>53</sup> Bengal was not alone. "All the provinces are crying for money", noted Montagu, "and the prospects of the reforms on which we had set all our hopes may be jeopardised or even ruined by the sheer force of financial stringency".<sup>54</sup> The whole thing was going to collapse "not as a triumph of non-cooperation as it will appear to be, but because of the financial position".<sup>55</sup>

The same sad tale came from Ronaldshay's successor, Lytton, who also contemplated resignation.<sup>56</sup> As a deficit of 40/50 lakhs was apprehended on ordinary administration, cuts were applied to the funds for nation-building activities, which had been passed after a year and half in office. Schemes of water supply and secondary

48 2d Marquess of Reading, op. cit., p. 253, quoting a letter of Montagu, 1 June 1921. See also The Minority Report, Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee, cmd. 2360 (1925), pp. 201-3.

49 Reading to Montagu, 23 June 1921, Montagu Coll., op. cit., vol. 14, p. 21.

50 Marquess of Zetland, *Essayez*, p. 146.

51 Ronaldshay to Reading, 12 July 1921, encl. Reading to Montagu 28 July 1921, Montagu coll., op. cit., vol. 14, pp. 41-42.

52 Reading to Ronaldshay, 28 July 1921, *ibid.*, p. 21.

53 Reading to Montagu, 23 June 1921, Reading Coll., op. cit.

54 Montagu to Reading, 15 August 1921, Montagu Coll., vol. 12, p. 279.

55 Same to same, 17 Nov. 1921, *ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 346.

56 Lytton *Pundits and Elephants*, p. 40.

education went by the board. An ugly quarrel cropped up between the Education Minister and the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University which ruffled the peace of the academic world and was duly exploited by the Swarajya Party. "There was little money to spend", reminisces Sir Robbert Reid, "and as the only path to progress lay through spending we could not get far. Only by outlay could old methods be bettered. All our schemes came up against a penniless if at heart sympathetic Finance Department . . . All this made it difficult for the ministers, who were exposed to criticism from their followers for not having more to show for holding office".<sup>57</sup> And if followers showed some moderation, the Swarajist critics would show no mercy.

The intention of Parliament had been thwarted. The Governors assumed greater control over transferred subjects than had been envisaged by the Joint Parliamentary Committee. R. P. Paranjpye's unhappiness with Sir George Lloyd of Bombay<sup>58</sup> or resignations of C. Y. Chintamani and Jagat Narain Lal over the conduct of Sir William Marris of U.P. underline the liberal predicament. Rules made by the India Government and the provincial Governors and practice established by the I.C.S. made matters worse. The Executive Councillors sometimes spoke against ministers while the latter could neither answer charges against Reserved Subjects nor clarify their own position before the public without divulging official secrets.<sup>59</sup>

Legislatures were not constituted on party lines except in Madras. Liberals had to seek cooperation from the avowed communalists and accept hateful compromises (as Surendranath accepted communal electorate in Calcutta Corporation) or indulge in plain jobbery for purchase of votes. Irwin tells an interesting story of how A. H. Ghuznavi of Bengal was brought down in 1927. On the day before the division the Nawab of Dacca wrote to Ghuznavi, his uncle, offering to give him his vote for Rs. 500. "Ultimately", writes Irwin, "it is said on very good authority, the Nawab's vote went to the Swarajists for Rs. 4000. He would appear not to value his family ties very highly".<sup>60</sup> Even the Central Government was not immune.

<sup>57</sup> Sir Robert Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam* (London, 1966).

<sup>58</sup> R. P. Paranjpye, *Eighty Four Not out* (Govt. of India, 1961), pp. 29-84.

<sup>59</sup> Notes of P. C. Mitter and S. N. Banerjee, Govt. of Bengal, Appt. Dept. 6R-43 of 1921 (4-150) 234-380, May 1922.

<sup>60</sup> Irwin to Birkenhead, 31 Aug 1927, Halifax Coll., Eur. Mss. C 152 (C.R.O.), vol. III, pp. 181-82.

The Army had announced a system of money grants to encourage mule-breeding. Two days after came a member from Punjab to the C.-in-C. and said that he should enjoy the benefits. "But do you know anything about mule-breeding?" parried the C.-in-C. "No", replied the undaunted politician, "but have I not voted for the government on the 1s 6d ratio?"<sup>61</sup>

Cold-shouldered by their governors, brow-beaten by their I.C.S. secretaries, wriggling in their impotence and stricken in conscience, the Liberals considered themselves prisoners in the Council while Gandhi was free in the prison. To use a memorable phrase of Professor C. H. Philips describing the liberal predicament in 1909, the Liberals stood ready to serve (again) in 1920-23 but were fobbed off. They were not very sorry to get out of the Council when the Swarajya Party trounced them in the election of 1923.

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C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, V. J. Patel, M. M. Malaviya and M. R. Jayakar had fought Gandhi's proposal for boycott of legislatures at the Calcutta Special Congress in 1920.<sup>62</sup> Das would rather follow the Irish model of obstruction inside and outside the legislature. His work in Council would be another variant of non-cooperation. As Broomfield has shown, this view accorded well with the elitist politics of his Bengali followers, afraid of terrorism as well as Gandhian mass movements. There were temperamental factors, too, for Broomfield's thesis does not explain the attitude of U.P. politicians. The Maharastri group opposed boycott of councils throughout. And even the Das-Nehru group agreed to boycott only for a temporary period. After the fiasco of Bardoli and Gandhi's imprisonment, Das and Nehru led the sceptics back to Council politics to expose the limited and irresponsible character of 1919 reforms through Parnellite tactics. Having met with a rebuff from Gandhi's staunch followers at Gaya Congress, which was then split into, what is known in the day's jargon, 'pro-changers' and 'ro-

61 Same to same, 29 Sept. 1927, *ibid.*, p. 200.

62 For change over of Motilal Nehru at Calcutta and Das at Nagpur, see Richard Gordon, 'Non-cooperation and Council Entry, 1919 to 1920' John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (ed.), *Locality, Province and Nation, Essays on Indian Politics 1870-1940* (Camb 1973), pp. 123-53; Judith Brown gives a different story in *Gandhi's Rise to Power Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Camb., 1972), chapt. 8.

changers', Das and Nehru formed the Congress-Khilafat-Swaraj Party on 1 January 1923. To keep the Muslims on his side (very important for a Bengal politician) Das had to include in his programme the triple boycott and constructive work. The prevalent confusion and demoralisation helped him to obtain permission from the Special Delhi Congress (September 1923) to take part in the coming elections and to carry on "uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction" within the Councils to make government impossible.<sup>63</sup>

They had poor rivals in the Liberal Federation, which had none of the party machinery associated with the Congress or the Muslim League, no strict rules of membership, no party funds, no leader with an appeal to a wide electorate and no aura of sacrifice, genuine or borrowed. For three years after the first elections under 1919 Act they had seldom cared to visit their constituencies or build an electoral organization. They had little achievement to show but many unpopular things to explain. The press and the platform had combined to tar them and the bureaucrats with the same unflattering brush and, the unkindest cut of all, far from helping them with advice (if not with money), the government either stood disdainfully aloof or indulged in cheap carping. An example of the former comes from Reading himself: "It would seem inevitable that in an appeal to an electorate, and where both parties are concerned in attacking the government, the party that shouts the loudest, hits hardest, demands most, will assuredly succeed and inflict defeat on a party which is equally bent on attack but is weaker in its criticism and gentler in denunciation and more moderate in demands ..."<sup>64</sup> The officials had the hardihood to lament the liberals' lack of faith,<sup>65</sup> as if they had not themselves significantly contributed to it.

With outstanding leadership, help of Congress link-men and ample funds the Swarajists fully exploited the Gandhian image of sacrifice as well as the Liberal self-pity. The Liberals failed to counter that the very decision of the Swarajists to enter the Council was an unwilling tribute to the liberal ideology. If liberalism had failed, so had non-cooperation in its extreme form. But the electorate was in no mood to give them a patient hearing. They rejected

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63 Report of Progs, Special Delhi Congress, A.I.C.C./F 5, 1923; M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, op. cit., vol. 2, Chaps. I-II; C. R. Das to Lytton, 16. Dec. 1923, Lytton, *Pundits and Elephants*, p. 44.

64 Reading to Lord Olivier, 7 Feb. 1924, Reading Coll, op. cit.

65 Home Pol. confid. no. 82/1925, pt. I and K.W.



the liberal experiment unceremoniously to the short-sighted delight of the Civilians.

"For the present", reported Reading to Olivier at the end of February 1924, "the Swarajist has it all his own way, there is none to withstand him; there is none to compare with him; there is none to attack him, . . . The moderate presents a very dull and dreary appearance as compared with the Swarajist". This was a superficial view of the situation. Reading and his men should have assessed the real character and weight of Swarajist obstructionism. Beneath its superior ways and denunciatory rhetoric lurked no fanatic revolutionaries. Their success in Bengal, as Broomfield points out, lay in spanning two levels of politics—the old level of sophisticated *bhadralok* and the new level of mass electorate. Das might enter into tactical understanding with the terrorists to capture the district Congress organizations or to play up the bogey of terrorism to persuade the Government to come to terms with him. He might even use it to force the government to promulgate coercive measures (like the Bengal Ordinance, 25 October 1924), which would help him to revive his waning influence.<sup>66</sup> But he did not believe in expulsion of the British Raj through armed rebellion. Motilal or Jayakar or Kelkar had no contact with the terrorists at all.

Imperatives of parliamentary government had put a further brake on the impetuosity of the Swarajists. In the central assembly they numbered 45 only. The Governor General should have noted that, when they formed a combination with the Independents, the latter made it clear that no obstruction would be launched unless it was agreed to by three fourths of their combined strength. The Swarajists began by sacrificing their avowed objective of continuous obstruction. The tone of Motilal was pitched low when he spoke on an amendment to T. Rangachari's resolution of 5 February 1924, which called

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<sup>66</sup> Reading to Olivier, 21 Feb. 1924, Reading Coll., op. cit. This seems to be a little far-fetched.

For outbreak of terrorism since May 1923, see *Terrorism in India 1917-1936*, compiled in the Intelligence Bureau, Home Dept., G.I. (1937), reprint by Deep Publications (N.D., 1947), pp. 16 et seq. A rebellious group of Anushilan and Surya Sen of the Chittagong branch of Jugantar formed the New Violence Party in 1925. Some of the former were implicated in Kakori Conspiracy Case. Chandra Sekhar Azad escaped Kakori to found with Bhagat Singh of Punjab and Phani Ghosh of Bihar—the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army. The rest were more interested in communist methods.

for a Round Table Conference to recommend full responsible government in India. "We Swarajists", said Nehru, "have come here to offer our cooperation. If the government will receive this cooperation, they will find we are their men".<sup>67</sup> Even when on the refusal of the National Demand by the first Labour Government,<sup>68</sup> the Swarajists decided to throw out budgetary demands, Motilal limited himself to the rejection of the first four heads on the revenue side.<sup>69</sup> The majority he could muster on these occasions ranged from one vote on Income Tax to nine votes on Salt Tax. The Finance Bill was thrown out by three votes only. Nehru took great pains to convince the Liberals that he was no wrecker and that he was only drawing attention to the country's grievances.<sup>70</sup>

Far from accepting their olive branch and Reading's suggestion that he be allowed to keep the initiative to himself, even if it meant promising further reforms under the Act of 1919<sup>71</sup>, the Labour Secretary of State ruled out any idea of a Commission from England and the Labour Under Secretary of State, in the Commons debate of 15 April 1924, ruled out reforms for a full decade. Olivier and Ramsay MacDonald took the plea that theirs was a minority government, that Montford reforms had not been given a fair trial and that Bengal Council's rejection of the budget did not give their party a chance to consider reforms.<sup>72</sup> The Governor General gloated over the rift between the Swarajists and the Independents. "Jinnah (the leader of

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67 Leg. Ass. Deb. 1924, vol. 4, pt. I, pp. 369-70

68 No progress towards Home Rule could take place, said Olivier, "unless Parliamentary system is welded together by predominant common interests from its foundation in the electorate upwards". Parl. Deb. H.L., 1924, vol. 56, pp. 332-34. Jayakar says Lord Olivier was deliberately misled by the Bombay government when he made this speech on 26 Feb. 1924. See Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 212 et seq.

69 Leg. Ass. Deb., 1924, vol. 4, pt. II, pp. 1418-19.

70 Ibid., p. 1443.

71 Oliver to Reading, 7 Feb. and 13 March 1924, Reading Coll., op. cit.

72 Olivier rejected Reading's suggestion for a Govt. of India Reform Enquiry Committee leading to the despatch of a Statutory Commission from England to consider revision of the constitution. See Olivier to Reading, 27 March 1924, *ibid.* When Reading pressed again on the political consideration of uniting the Independents and the Liberals against the Swarajists (Reading to Olivier, 17 April 1924), Olivier told the Viceroy that he was not going to appoint any commission—Statutory or Parliamentary. Olivier to Reading, 15 May 1924, *ibid.* For the episode, see Parthasarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914-1964* (Camb. Commonwealth Series, 1975), pp. 102 et seq.

the Independent Party) evidently thought", comments Reading, "that by the terms of the alliance he would be sitting in the driving seat of the motorcar holding the steering wheel, with Motilal Nehru beside him powerless to control except by means of advice. The exact opposite resulted. Motilal Nehru was in the driving seat and Jinnah was scarcely even beside him; but his Party inside the car, being driven along without realising whither they were going or what would happen".<sup>73</sup> On his part, Reading did his best to widen the rift. He was more than a match for Macdonald, who set up a Cabinet committee on Indian affairs, and Oliver, who hoped to win over Swarajists by informal parley at London. Reading sabotaged the conference (proposed by the Cabinet) by sending Hailey to persuade the P.M. and alienate the Liberal support. Reading kept out the Swarajists even from the Muddiman Committee.

The next year in the Central Assembly opened with a struggle over the Bengal Ordinance which the opposition sought to repeal by a resolution. After two days debate the government was defeated by 13-58 votes, which showed that the Swarajists—Independent coalition was still viable. In fact, it always operated on issues of individual liberty, as on V. J. Patel's bill to repeal State Prisons Act of 1850, the Punjab Frontier Outrages Act of 1857 and the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act of 1921. But, as the communal tension grew, the alliance wore thinner.

"Each of the two great religious communities", writes Reading, "that is, the Hindu and Moslem, is wondering whether the other may not obtain greater benefit from government by the display of more goodwill to government."<sup>74</sup> The government could easily play one against the other. Jinnah was won over on the budget.<sup>75</sup> During the Assembly debate of 25 February, in which Motilal proposed the complete cut of the demand for a Railway Board, Jinnah made a public attack on him, and the government triumphed by a large majority.<sup>76</sup> The Swarajists succeeded in securing refusal of the demand on the Governor General's Executive Council but the Independents switched over to vote for the Governor General's Household and for the Army.<sup>77</sup> "... the outstanding factor", comments Reading, "is that

73 Reading to Olivier, 13 March 1924, Reading Coll., op. cit., vol. 7, p. 33.

74 Reading to Birkenhead, 12 Feb. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

75 Same to same, 19 Feb. 1925, *ibid.*

76 Same to same, 26 Feb. 1925, *ibid.*

77 Leg. Ass. Deb., 1925, vol. 5, pt. I, pp. 1514, 1669-1809, 2403-8.

Jinnah has pronounced against indiscriminate obstruction and has actually stated that he had made a mistake last year and was led into it by Motilal Nehru".<sup>78</sup> During the debate on Salt Tax the Swarajists were defeated when they moved to reduce it to 8as and than to 12as a maund. Jinnah was under a vigorous attack from his erstwhile allies, to the delight of the Governor General : ". . . for once we have the spectacle in the Assembly of the Government case being championed by Independents and others, although of course they have sidethursts all the time at the government . . ."<sup>79</sup>

The Swarajists faced active, and admittedly unconstitutional, hostility of Lytton in Bengal. C. R. Das had paid a high price for the help of 21 Muslim M.L.C.s in the Hindu-Muslim Pact of 1923. Byomkes Chakravarti's faction joined him later. Here, too, the battle raged over repressive laws and financial demands, the climax of which came with the rejection in March 1924 of every demand on the reserved side, except that for police, and refusal of grants to pay the salaries of the Education Department Inspectorate, the Medical Department Establishment and the ministers! Lytton toyed with the idea of stretching his powers to authorise an interim payment for the ministers, but Reading refused to sanction it. "My objection . . .", he explained to Olivier, "was intended to protect him against the risk of charges he might find it difficult to answer. These might seriously impair his position as Governor".<sup>80</sup>

The complete collapse of dyarchy, involved in the revocation of the transferred subjects, was postponed. The obvious tactics was to play the Muslim card and work the power of patronage for all it was worth. The Chief Secretary justified it, as the Swarajists had been breaking all rules of decency.<sup>81</sup> Sir Abdur Rahim, member of Lytton's Executive Council, laid down the strategy of defection—viz. destroying the faith of Das's followers in the Hindu-Muslim Pact. A communal party was assembled. Even the authority of the mullahs was invoked on the eve of the voting on salaries in July. When the Swarajists outmanoeuvred them by a High Court injunction against resubmission of salaries and Lytton wanted to fight it out,<sup>82</sup> Reading, by amending

78 Reading to Birkenhead, 26 Feb. 1925, Birkenhead, Coll., op. cit.

79 Same to same, 19 March 1925, *ibid*.

80 (2d) Marquess of Reading, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 286-87.

81 Chief Secy., Govt. of Bengal to Govt. of India, 14 June 1924, quoted in Broomfield, *Elite conflict in a Plural Society Twentieth Century Bengal*. (Calif. 1968), fn 42, p. 253.

82 Lytton, op. cit., pp. 52-3.

rules, saved him once more from an act of constitutional impropriety. The new demand was rejected in August 1924 for the second time..

When the Bengal Council reassembled in January 1925 Das had gained strength from the coercive Bengal Ordinance of 25 October 1924 which had swept into prison three Swarajist leaders. Lytton had been pressing for it since June, alleging that Das and Subhas Bose were secretly financing terrorists. The Viceroy had yielded to the pressure of Bengal police against his better judgement. Oliver had accepted Lytton's story without demur and Macmillan authorised it.<sup>83</sup> The Bengal Council refused to give the government leave to introduce the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which sought to replace the Ordinance, by 9 to 66 votes.<sup>84</sup> When Lytton appointed ministers from the Liberals, the Swarajist-Independent coalition rejected their salaries for the third time on 23 March. Dugusted with repeated failures, Lytton suspended the transferred departments till 1927. "I should like His Majesty's Government", Lytton wrote to the Secretary of State on the proposal for antedating constitutional enquiry, "to get away from the question of time altogether and lay down clearly and emphatically two propositions : (1) that the success of one stage is the only condition which would justify an advance to a subsequent stage, (2) that those who claimed to have proved the failure of the first stage have made themselves responsible for any delay there may be in proceeding to the next stage. I submit therefore that the Act requires amendment not in the direction of enlarging the field of self-government but in the direction of limiting more strictly the area in which self-government may be exercised".<sup>85</sup> He wanted to give Bengal and C. P. an object lesson by reserving all subjects to the Governor in Council.<sup>86</sup> His anger was an expression of his despair and a tribute to the tactics of the Swarajya Party.

"A personal triumph for Das"—Reading admits. But what would Das do with an empty triumph? It had not brought the government to a standstill nor forced it to make concessions. Meanwhile, the

83 Lytton to Reading, 26 June 1924, Reading to Olivier, 9 July 1924, Olivier to Macdonald, 15 Sept. 1924, Macdonald to Wheatley, 21 Sept. 1924, referred to in Parthasarathi Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

84 Reading to Birkenhead, 8 Jan. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., *op. cit.*

85 Lytton to Birkenhead, 4 June 1925, encl. Birkenhead to Irwin, 20 May 1926, Halifax Coll., Eur. Mss. C 152/1, pp. 9-15

86 Lytton to Birkenhead, 28 Sept. 1925, *ibid.*, p. 18. Same to same, 25 Feb. 1926, *ibid.*, p. 24.

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Swarajists faced insoluble problems on all sides. The Hindus reacted sharply to the pact of 1923. The Muslims were disillusioned after Das had cleverly wriggled out of it on Musharaff Hussain's demand for immediate offer of 80% of posts to their community. Gandhi was out of prison and the no-changers were regaining self-confidence. At first a source of strength,<sup>87</sup> the terrorists were fast becoming an embarrassment. Das's stand on the Gopinath Saha resolution<sup>88</sup> pacified them but offended the Muslims and the Gandhites. The infights for posts and contracts at the Calcutta Corporation were getting more and more acrimonious and besmirching the fair name of Das himself.

Das-Lytton *pourparler* at this stage highlights the desperate need of the Swarajya Party for a sympathetic response from the Raj. Lytton had probably been empowered by Reading to hold out possibilities of concessions if Das publicly repudiated violence. Das did so on 29 March, 1925. He was even ready to accept office, though himself keeping out, on some minor face-saving concessions, like a big loan for developmental projects.<sup>89</sup>

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87 "The dividing line between the two (i.e. Swarajya Party and the revolutionaries) had worn so thin that at times it was difficult to differentiate between them". Home Pol. 82/1025, pt. I & K W.

88 In June 1924 the Bengal Provincial Congress at Serajunj passed a resolution expressing admiration for the spirit of self-sacrifice exhibited by Gopinath Saha who had killed one Mr. Day under the mistaken assumption that he had been the Police Commissioner, Charles Tegart. Gandhi brought forward the following resolution at A.I.C.C., Ahmedabad, on 29 June, 1924: "The A.I.C.C. regrets the murder of the late Mr. Day by the late Gopinath Saha and offers its condolences to the deceased's family; and though deeply sensible of the love, however misguided, of the country prompting the murder, the A.I.C.C. strongly condemns this and all such political murders and is emphatically of opinion that all such acts are inconsistent with the Congress creed and its resolution of non-violent non-cooperation . . ." It was passed by only eight votes after all attempts at amendment had failed. ". . . I undoubtedly regard the voting as a triumph for Mr. Das," Gandhi said, "although he was apparently defeated by eight votes. That he could find 70 supporters out of 148 who voted had a deep significance for me." 'Defeated and Humbled.' C.W., vol. 24, p. 334.

89 Lytton to Birkenhead, 15 April 1925, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit. On 30 July Lytton writes, ". . . on two or three separate occasions during the last year of his life C. R. Das sent messages to me through an intermediary, and this led to an interview between him and Stephenson . . . I also met him once informally at the house of a mutual friend last cold weather. The interesting fact about all his proposals on these occasions was that no mention was ever made of the repeal of the Ordinance or the release of the Ordinance prisoners". Lytton blames Radhakumud Mukherjee for spreading exaggerated reports of Lytton-Das negotiation. Lytton to Birkenhead, 30 July 1925, *ibid*.

During the debate in the Lords on the Bengal Ordinance (31 March 1925)—it would be certified by the Governor in April as the Bengal Criminal Law Amd. Act of 1925—Birkenhead invited Das to move a step further, “to go forward and cooperate with the Government in repressing the violence he deprecates”. He did not intend it as a gesture to Das: “. . . It was intended merely in a very safe method to make it plain that there was very great lack of precision and completeness in the first tentative overture which Das made . . .”<sup>90</sup> Das could not confront his followers with a promise of the British government. In spite of their opposition and even defeat at their hands in Faridpur Conference,<sup>91</sup> Das almost begged in his presidential speech for a clear pronouncement on Dominion Status to which he now gave greater importance than Swaraj. His party was split, reports Kerr, the acting Governor of Bengal. He went to Darjeeling, “and the impression is that he is afraid to leave Bengal lest the breach should become even wider in his absence.”<sup>92</sup> He was waiting for a word from Whitehall. “I believe,” he wrote to Motilal three days before his death, “something may come out of the Reading-Birkenhead conversations which are going on about India (between April and August 1925). I fear that you do not attach any importance to them. You may be right but something tells one that they will make some kind of proposal to us.”<sup>93</sup>

Poor Das! He was to Birkenhead what Gokhale had been to Morley. He did not know that to Birkenhead, “it is frankly inconceivable that India will ever be fit for Dominion Self-government,” that Birkenhead wanted rigidly to adhere to the date proposed for reexamination of the situation mentioned in the Act of 1919 and felt “that it is not likely, unless matters greatly change in the interval that such a reexamination will suggest the slightest extension”.<sup>94</sup> Like

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90 Birkenhead to Lytton, 8 April 1925, *ibid.* This speech, he wrote later, “if carefully read, made no advance of any kind but rather constituted a warning”. Same to same, 30 April 1925, *ibid.*

91 See the *Indian Quarterly Register*, January to June 1925, pp. 387-95. Lytton to Birkenhead, 14 May 1925, Birkenhead Coll., *op. cit.*

92 Same to same, 21 May 1925, *ibid.* This seems to be wishful thinking on the part of Kerr

93 C. R. Das to M. Nehru (23) June 1925. As Das died on 16 June, it is clear that it should be 13 June 1925. Jayakar misprints 23 June in *The Story of My Life*, vol. II, p. 543.

94 Birkenhead to Reading, 4 Dec. 1924, Charlton Archives. Same to same, 29 Jan. 1925, Reading Coll. *op. cit.*

Charles Wood after the Mutiny, the Secretary of State emphasized the role of the British as 'composers' in a scene of 'infinite variations' and 'profound antagonisms'.<sup>95</sup>

While Das thought Reading and Birkenhead were taking a decision (and a favourable one) on the declaration of Dominion Status, they were actually discussing the official policy on the Muddiman Committee Report. Lytton was warning Birkenhead: "Das is not a person to whom much consideration need be given. He has shown himself to be a leader who commonly follows, he dare not break with the extreme section of the party although I have no doubt that he is personally opposed to violent methods. As however he cannot influence the actions and opinions of his avowed followers, he is no use to us . . . *As an opponent he has ceased to be formidable, as a friend he will be useless*".<sup>96</sup> Birkenhead readily agreed that "a leader who cannot bring his followers on to constitutional lines is not a man who can offer us anything that we need".<sup>97</sup> Lytton was cruel, but not wrong, when he stated, "politically speaking, . . . C. R. Das died at Faridpur."<sup>98</sup>

The requiem on Das's death was sung by Birkenhead in his 7 July speech in the Lords and by Reading in his 20 August speech in the Indian Legislative Assembly. "The door to acceleration", said the former, "is not open to menace. Still less will it be stormed by violence". After brandishing the stick, he held out the carrot—"wise men are not slaves of dates. Rather are dates the servants of sagacious man".<sup>99</sup> To the extremists Reading said plainly that it would be a profound mistake to believe that nothing was to be won from England save by force or threats. To the Responsivists he gave the assurance, "we desire and request good will, nor shall we be niggardly bargainers if we meet with that generous friendship which is near and dear to our hearts".<sup>100</sup> Whatever might be the effect on the Responsivists, the Swarajists were disappointed.<sup>101</sup> Instead of the bread of Dominion

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95 Same to same, 22 Jan. 1925, *ibid.*

96 Lytton to Birkenhead, 21 May 1925, Birkenhead Coll., *op. cit.* Ital mine.

97 Birkenhead to Lytton, 11 June 1925, *ibid.*

98 Lytton to Birkenhead, 18 June 1925, *ibid.*

99 Parl Deb., H. L., 5th series, vol. 61, col 1078.

100 2d. Marquess of Reading, *op. cit.*, p. 541.

101 Reading to Birkenhead, 27 Aug. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., *op. cit.*



Status they received Birkenhead's challenge to formulate a constitution for India, acceptable to all parties : in short, an apple of discord.

But, for the time being, it brought the warring liberals, Independents and the Swarajists together. The Nehru amendment to the Government's proposal for acceptance of the majority report of the Muddiman Committee, known as (the second) National Demand, was carried by 45-14 votes. Even Jinnah's terms for cooperation were revision of the constitution and immediate appointment of a Royal Commission with a satisfactory personnel.<sup>102</sup>

Reading only saw that the Swarajist demand was a climb-down from that of 1924. Nehru's motion specifically laid down that defence, political relations and foreign affairs were to remain reserved subjects for a fixed term. "Make us masters in our own home", said he, "but whatever else is outside the home, and pertains more to your imperial interests, you are welcome to keep."<sup>103</sup> He did not demand a Round Table Conference as in 1924. The outlines of the constitution might be considered by "a convention, R.T.C. or any suitable agency" to be constituted by the Governor General in consultation with the Assembly, and a Royal Commission could do as well. The demand was so moderate that the Liberals hailed it.

Reading knew also of their differences. Jinnah started the notion of *en masse* resignation from the Assembly, but Nehru said that the Swarajists would resign only if Jinnah could persuade the Independents to do so first. The election of the Speaker caused a rift between Jinnah, who backed Rangachariar, and the Nehru group, who backed V. J. Patel. With the worsening communal situation and riots at Panipat, Allahabad and Aligarh, the Governments' influence tended to increase.<sup>104</sup>

The discipline in the Swarajist camp was crumbling. In addition to Patel's acceptance of the Presidency of the Assembly, S. M. Tambe was appointed Executive Councillor in C.P. and Motilal himself got a seat in the Sken Committee. Some of the supporters of Motilal found no difference between his action and Tambe's or Patel's.<sup>105</sup> Jayakar and the Bombay Swarajists had been talking of responsive

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102 Jinnah to Jayakar, 12 July 1925, Jayakar, *op cit.*, vol. II. p. 591.

103 Leg. Ass. Deb., 1925, vol. 6, pt. II, p. 863.

104 Reading to Birkenhead, 1 Oct. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., *op. cit.*

105 Same to same, 28 Oct. 1925, *ibid.* For these squabbles, see P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Congress*, vol. 1, pp. 292 et seq.

cooperation since 1924.<sup>106</sup> Their tussle with Motilal came to a head at the Nagpur meeting of the Swarajya Party executive on 1 November 1925. The Swarajya Party in Bengal had been plagued by inner squabbles since Das's death. J. M. Sengupta was elected leader of the B.P.C.C. and the Legislature Party, though the extremists objected to his English wife and forced him to abjure "drinking and European ball dancing", while the Muslims objected to his being elected the Mayor of Calcutta as well.<sup>107</sup> Gandhi's warning that the Council was a *maya* was coming true. The Swarajists were listening more avidly to its siren song. They were alternating between the temptation to cooperate and the pledge to obstruct. "The Swarajist in the Assembly", writes Reading, "is affected by the atmosphere of parliamentary debate and of intercourse with members of government etc., but when he gets away among his people in the various districts he finds a tendency for opinion amongst his party to be divided, discipline relaxes, there are rumours of defections, suggestions of possible prizes that are going to fall to the Swarajist leaders from Government, concessions of an individual character to be made to them, and the consequence is that the Swarajist falls back upon his original programme again".<sup>108</sup>

Motilal Nehru made matters worse by trying to beat the party into shape. "Nehru has not at the moment a bed of roses", reports Reading, "and he has been lashing out in all directions. He has attacked the Independents rather violently and has brandished a big stick over the heads of those in or around his party who do not bow to the knee to him and has round (sic) up by vague and rather wild threats against the government of what he has planned to do if we do not immediately give in to his demands".<sup>109</sup> Unable to stand Motilal's dictatorial methods, partly born of an ungovernable temper and partly of despair, Kelkar and Jayakar resigned from the Executive Council of the Swarajya Party. "As you know", complains Nehru to Gandhi, "the Marhatta group never took kindly to non-cooperation. They were compelled to join the movement by the pressure of public opinion. The same cause led them to join the Swaraj Party without believing in its principles".<sup>110</sup> Jayakar, in his turn, complained that, notwithstanding all talk of obstruction, the Swaraj Party was really showing cooperation with the government, and they should put forward at

106 Jayakar to M. Nehru, 15 Jan. 1924, Jayakar Papers.

107 Lytton to Birkenhead, 9 July 1925, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

108 Reading to Birkenhead, 4 Nov. 1925, *ibid.*

109 Same to same, 12 Nov. 1925, *ibid.*

110 M. Nehru to Gandhi, 25 Nov. 1925, photostat S. N. 10665.

the next elections a clear and honest programme of accepting responsibility: . . . "many people agree with this view, but are not prepared to say so openly, because they think that wild talk of civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes will give the Swaraj Party a greater hold on the electorate".<sup>111</sup> The two factions failed to iron out their differences at Bombay and fared no better at Kanpur Congress. It should be noted that both had been appealing to Gandhi who, all through a silent spectator to their bickerings, ultimately threw his weight in favour of Motilal and against acceptance of office at Kanpur. He had already become more than a balancing factor.

Kelkar, Jayakar and Moonje resigned their seats in the Council and formed the Responsive Cooperation Party. Malaviya and Rangachariar left the Independent Party. After a conference at Bombay (3 April 1926) a new party called "The Indian National Party" was formed, which, in Reading's eyes, had a definitely Hindu bias,<sup>112</sup> and, in Irwin's view, was "a loosely knit coalition".<sup>113</sup> It excluded civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes and had liberty to resort inside the Legislature to responsive cooperation. The two wings of the Swarajya Party met once more at Sabarmati and concluded a pact on 21 April 1926,<sup>114</sup> but differing interpretations of terms for acceptance of office made it obsolete even before the ink on it was dry.<sup>115</sup> At the A.I.C.C., Ahmedabad (May), Motilal explained that whereas the responsivists wanted to work out the Reforms for whatever their worth, his group would like the Faridpur conditions of Das to be fulfilled before office could be accepted. The A.I.C.C. did not ratify the pact.

Reading's term was coming to an end and he wanted to proclaim a definite date for a Royal Commission before he went, "in order to encourage the liberals and the Independents to unite on a common

111 Jayakar to M. Nehru, 26 Nov. 1925, photostat, S. N. 10667.

112 Reading to Birkenhead, 25 Feb. 1926, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

113 Irwin to Birkenhead, 20 April 1926, *ibid.* "The trouble seems to be as with the Liberal Party at home—the multiplicity of leaders!" Same to same, 13 April 1926, *ibid.*

114 C.W., vol. 30, App. II. Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru, 23 April 1926.

115 "The moderate Swarajists are disposed to see in it a victory for the Congress policy, the Responsivists claim it as a victory for themselves, while Motilal Nehru finds himself strongly attacked on the flank by the straiter sect of his supporters, who accuse him of having sold the pass." Irwin to Birkenhead, 5 May 1926. Birkenhead Coll., op. cit. Sitaramayya says, "South India was against the Sabarmati Pact." Sitaramayya, op. cit., p. 301.

platform for the general election".<sup>116</sup> He suggested 1927. Determined to forestall Labour in appointing the Commission, Birkenhead was not unwilling.<sup>117</sup> As elections drew nearer, Reading pressed again.<sup>118</sup> He had isolated Gandhi once; and he planned to isolate the Swarajists now. Although he drew attention to the impact of any delay on Jinnah and the Liberals,<sup>119</sup> the declaration of a Commission never came.

Meanwhile, the Swarajya Party was in a greater disarray. "The Sabarmati Pact has now completely gone", reports Irwin, "and Nehru and the Responsive Cooperationists have departed their separate ways . . . He (Motilal Nehru) has made more enemies than friends in his own part by his later demarche; and in particular the Madras Swarajists seem likely to choose their own leader and give him his conge".<sup>120</sup> The Swarajists' withdrawal from the Assembly on 8 March 1926 had been a dramatic gesture to the electorate but Muddiman sarcastically predicted that the sheep would soon have to return to the fold. V. J. Patel appealed to Irwin to help the Swarajists with "a bridge to get back from a position which they find no longer tenable." Irwin refused to induce them to return to the Assembly as "Motilal and his friends had themselves-and themselves only-to thank for the mess in which they now found themselves . . ." If the Viceroy made any such gesture, it might be used as implied admission of the government that the Swarajist walk out was justified by the result and the government could not do without them.<sup>121</sup>

All these seemed increasingly irrelevant in view of the dark clouds of communal passion gathering in the political sky: "... it sets all the political bargaining and attempts at compromises and formulation of programmes etc. at a bit of a discount, for they are up against something much bigger and more vital."<sup>122</sup> The Governor General was commenting on the Calcutta riots (2-16 April 1926) which came as the climax to a series of communal disturbances

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116 Reading to Birkenhead, 31 Dec. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

117 Birkenhead to Reading, 10 Dec 1925, Reading Coll., op. cit.

118 Reading to Birkenhead, 4 Feb. 1926, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

119 Same to same, 11 and 25 Feb. 1926, *ibid.*

120 Irwin to Birkenhead, 12 May 1926, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. II, p. 19.

121 Same to same, 16 June 1926, *ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

The Swarajists returned once more to the Simla session of the Assembly to participate in the discussion on the Currency Bill, fixing the ratio of the rupee at 1s. 6d. sterling. They forced the adjournment of the consideration of the bill till the next session.

122 Irwin to Birkenhead, 28 April 1926, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

tearing India to pieces since 1924. Birkenhead was partly right when he traced the riots to reforms. "The moment the idea gains ground in India", he wrote after the Calcutta riots, "that one day there is to be self-government, the Moslems at once ask themselves where they come in upon such a readjustment, having regard to their numerical inferiority; and so apprehension deepens into agitation from which in India violence is so easily begotten."<sup>123</sup> But the trend of Gandhian politics was also responsible. Passions were accentuated by a backlash of frustrations the two communities, especially the Khilafatists, felt at the sudden withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement by Gandhi after Chaurichaura. Reading's clever move to obtain revision of the Treaty of Sevrés had driven a wedge between the Khilafatists and non-cooperators. Montagu's resignation had furnished decisive proof to the Muslims of Reading's bonafides. With the suspension of the movement and the abolition of the Caliphate by Kamal Pasha early in 1924, the need for a common front was gone. Aga Khan and Muhammad Shafi tried to divert the Khilafatists from the Congress. In the memorable words of Khaliquzzaman, "The disruption of the Khilafat organization was like a breach in the embankment of the flowing stream of Muslim mass emotion, which diverted it into several petty streams, some leading to desert lands there to dry up, some flowing by zig zag routes to meet the original bed in their headlong march and some others rushing towards the mighty flowing ocean to drown themselves . . . We are divided between ourselves, some rushing recklessly towards the Congress, without sufficient safeguards for the Muslims of India, some others raising their head to cling to the British Raj with redoubled satisfaction".<sup>124</sup> Gandhi's arrest had removed the restraint on Hindu communalism. Khilafat movement had brought the Maulavies and the Ulemas to the fore. The Council-entry question found Ansari and Azad on the side of no-changers and Ajmal Khan and Khaliquzzaman on the side of pro-changers. With the disappearance of national issues, petty things, like *Kurbani* and music before mosques, loomed large. The Hindu Mahasabha's real work started at the end of 1922 with the conversion of the Malkana Rajputs. By the beginning of February 1923, fifty Maulavies were at work, all organised under Ulemas. Thereafter *suddhi* and *sangathan* vied with *Tanzim* and

123 Birkenhead to Irwin, 8 July 1926. Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. I, p. 51.

124 Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore 1961), p. 74.

*Tabligh* for the possession of the Hindu or Muslim soul.<sup>125</sup> 1923 witnessed riots almost every week—at Multan, Amritsar, Moradabad, Bilaspur. Gandhi could only ask the Hindus to set their houses in order and be brave enough to trust, which had no effect. The Bakr Id issue led to further riots in 1924 at Nagpur, Jabbalpur and Berar. Would Hindus listen to Gandhi's admonition that it was strange they never protested against slaughter of cows by Christians, or that "to kill men was a greater crime than killing cows"? Would Muslims hear that "Islam does not make it obligatory for a Mussalman to prevent a non-Muslim from playing music near mosques", or that desecration of temples "cannot enhance the dignity of Islam"?<sup>126</sup>

Gandhi and Shaukat Ali themselves differed on the responsibility for Kohat riot (Sept. 1924).<sup>127</sup> The twenty one day fast Gandhi undertook (from 17 Sept. 1924) "to qualify himself for achieving an equal love between the Hindus and the Muslims" had a temporary effect. The sub-committee, appointed by the Delhi Unity Conference, met on 1 March 1925 to adjourn *sine die* without a positive decision. Lajpat Rai did not care to attend. Das's death took the lid off the witch's cauldron in Bengal. Not only did a bad riot follow within two weeks of his death on the issue of Kurbanī but a substantial portion of the B.P.C.C. rebelled against the Pact of 1923. If Lajpat and Shraddhanand and some Bengalis were turning communal under the impact of events, so were Dr. Kitchlew and many Khilafatists.<sup>128</sup> Lajpat openly accused Gandhi of partiality towards Moslems.<sup>129</sup> No less than sixteen riots took place in 1925 and twenty five next year.

125 G.I. Special Reforms, File no. 66 of 1927. Dr. Kitchlew set up the Tanzim organisation in the summer of 1923 as a counter to Hindu Sangathan. The Tablig, organised about the same time, was to counter Suddhi. Among the few Khilafatists, who kept aloof, are the Ali brothers and Azad. See J. B. Mathur, 'Tanzim and Tablig movements in Modern India, etc.' *The Islamic Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1968, pp. 22-25.

126 C.W., vol.

127 *Young India*, 26 March 1925.

The Kohat riot took place on 9-10 Sept. 1924. The Govt. report accused Sangathan & Khilafat Movements, Home Pol. no. 249/VIII, part B of 1924. Gandhi differed. Shaukat Ali published his own view on the same Journal which accused Hindus as much as the Moslems.

128 Presidential address, A.I. Khilafat Conf., Belgaum, 24 Dec. 1924, I.Q.R., vol. II, p. 481. For Hindu Mahasabha's & Lajpat's views, see Indra Prakash, p. 35, Craig Baxter, p. 12.

129 V. C. Joshi (ed.), *Lajpat Rai, Writings & Speeches*, vol. 2, p. 172. Also Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, p. 248.

While Bhai Paramanand moved for a Hindu Sevak Association at the Delhi session of the Mahasabha in March, 1926, Maulana Syed Suleman Nadni called for 10,000 volunteers to safeguard Muslim interests against 'Lalas' (Arya Samajists) at a Khilafat Conference in April. The cumulative communal hatred ultimately exploded in the Calcutta riots between 2 and 15 April, 1926.

The Government posed as the protector of the victims but was actually relieved. "In a later passage of your speech", writes Reading to Birkenhead, "you lamented the recent renewal of outbreaks between Hindu and Mahomedan. Both you and I must, of course, speak of these outbreaks in the tones you used; and obviously their occurrences must involve you and your local representatives as trustees for the maintenance of order in the greatest anxiety . . . But surely the complete break down of a Hindu-Mahomedan anti-reform unity, looked at very broadly, spells a death-blow to Das and the whole of the Hindu campaign."<sup>130</sup>

The elections of 1926 were dominated by "communal bias."<sup>131</sup> Irwin predicted as early as July that the elections would return a solid block of Muslims to the Central Assembly, while the Hindus would be divided into three groups—Swarajists, Responsive Co-operationists and Liberals. "There may be one or two like Jinnah, who put their religion second, but I do not think there will be many." (Actually, Jinnah passed a communal resolution at the Aligarh session of the League (1925) against Mohammad Ali's protest.) The Hindu Mahasabha would try to combine the Hindus, but "the orthodox Swarajists will do their best to stymie this," while the Responsivists were divided by extensive personal animosities.<sup>132</sup>

At a conference in Bombay (3 April 1926), presided over by Sapru, Responsivists, Independents and Liberals met to form an Indian National Party,<sup>133</sup> while Lajpat formed an Independent Congress Party. This unnerved Motilal. "The Malaviya-Lala gang", he fulminated, "aided by Birlas' money are making frantic efforts to capture the Congress."<sup>134</sup> As Motilal's more perceptive son saw, "on

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130 Reading to Birkenhead, 22 Jan. 1925, Reading Coll.; vol. 8, pt. I, p. 3.

131 Irwin to Birkenhead, 3 Nov. 1926, Halifax Coll., vol. II, p. 130.

132 Same to same, 15 July 1926, *ibid.*, p. 53.

133 *Leader*, 4 April 1926. Also same to same, 2 Sept. 1926, *ibid.*, p. 93.

134 M. Nehru to J. Nehru, 2 Dec 1926, M. Nehru Papers (J.N.M.M.L.), file no. N-4.

the one side, there were Muslim fears of a Hindu majority; on the other side, Hindu resentment at being bullied, as they conceived it, by the Muslims." He could not make out, he wrote later in *Autobiography*, "what grounds of principle separated the new party from the old." The Nationalist Party was "a motley crowd of title-holders, big land-ho'ders, industrialists and others . . ."<sup>135</sup>

In the elections of November 1926 the Swarajists put up a poor show every where except in Madras. The Punjab Hindu Sabha prejudiced Swarajist chances in that province. Lajpat trounced Congress candidates in two constituences. In spite of Motilal's dubious declaration that "the Congress is as good a Hindu body as one can want",<sup>136</sup> he was the only Hindu Swarajist to be returned from U.P. The Swarajist position in Bengal was maintained on the slogan of 'release the prisoners', but a large defection of Muslims ensued. There were defections of a different kind in Maharastra and C.P. "Where the Hindu-Muslim propaganda has been most active, i.e. in the Punjab and U.P., the Swarajists have lost the most heavily", reported the Viceroy. "In Bombay and C.P. the Responsivist propaganda was active and the Swarajist suffered severe reverses in consequence . . . The Muslims have gone entirely away from them, because their communal interests provided a ready-made political platform and focus of loyalty. The Mahomedan defection from the Swarajist Party in Bengal is very significant."<sup>137</sup>

The Government congratulated itself. The Swarajists would not be able now to block business at the Centre. They were balanced by their rivals, the Responsivists. The Independent Party of Jinnah was no more. He sat alone. With a face-saving formula, the Swarajists might be tempted to take office in Madras, Bengal and U.P. The self-complacence proved to be premature. In failing to support the Liberals in 1923 and in aiding the debacle of the Swarajists in 1926, the Government had only cleared the stage for the re-emergence of Gandhi.

\* [To be continued]

135 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Autobiography* (Lond. 1936), pp. 157-58.

136 Irwin to Birkenhead, 23 Sept. 1926, Halifax Coll., vol. II, pp. 112-13.

137 Same to same, 1 Dec. 1926, *ibid*, pp. 163-64 and 30 Dec. 1926, *ibid*., pp. 178-79. Subhas Chandra Bose writes of the Muslim breakaway in Mymensingh, Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah, Barisal and other districts. Subhash Chandra Bose to Motilal Nehru, 12 July 1928, A.I.C.C., file no. 2/1928.



## THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN BENGAL AND THE GOVERNMENT 1850—1900

BINAY BHUSHAN CHAUDHURI

Contrary to what some 'worshippers of continuity'<sup>1</sup> affirm, the Indian rural society underwent significant changes during colonial rule. Though some of these changes would probably have occurred even without its intervention, it undoubtedly 'acted as an important catalyst to change, both directly through its effects on property rights and indirectly through its effects on the pace of monetization in the indigenous economy and on the growth of population'.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, the British did not foresee all of the changes and did not want many of them to happen in the way they eventually did. However, once such changes had come to stay the administration could scarcely ignore them, and had to intervene from time to time in order either to promote or to retard, or at least to control them.

The nature of the intervention varied from province to province, partly because of the distinctiveness of the regional problems, and partly of the structure of the administration that had gradually evolved over the years in the different regions. In Bengal the permanent fixation of land revenue precluded the kind of contacts of the administration with the rural society, which were common in the temporarily-settled areas, gradually leading to the emergence of a highly formalised administration. The response of the local government to new issues was inevitably conditioned by its limited knowledge of the actual agrarian situation. A further constraint on its activity derived from the fact that Bengal was a 'Regulation' province, where the administration tended to be guided more by 'laws and rules' which gradually hardened into a 'settled system of procedure' than by its

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1. A phrase borrowed from Henry Pirenne

2. G. Myrdal, *Asian Drama* (New York, 1968), II, 1033.

intimate awareness of the actual needs of the agrarian community.<sup>3</sup> However, despite this certain agrarian issues did call for a more active role of the Government, and the present paper discusses the nature of this role in the second half of the 19th century, when some crucial changes occurred in the agrarian society of Bengal.

1 : *Developments that particularly worried the Government.*

Of such issues two particularly concerned the Government : firstly, the increasing evidence of the frailty of the base of the local peasant economy, which the recurring famines of the time revealed, despite what the Government considered to be signs of agricultural prosperity, such as the increase of cultivation, the expansion of the market for agricultural produces and the rising agricultural prices ; and secondly, the increasing evidence of intensifying rural tension, particularly the increasingly bitter relations between zamindars, including the indigo planters, and the ryots. The concern over the behaviour of the peasant economy derived not merely from the considerations of administrative stability, which famines temporarily disrupted, but also from a widespread feeling, which became particularly strong since the early 1850s, when the fate of the Charter Act was being debated, that a stable agriculture in Bengal would be eventually beneficial also to the manufacturing interests in Britain.<sup>4</sup>

2 : *Explanation of the limited direct role of the Government in strengthening the peasant economy : inapplicability of the 'colonial theory of poverty' to the assumptions of the Government in this regard.*

Generally speaking, as shown later, the role of the Government in strengthening the peasant economy was a negligible one. In contrast, it played a far more active role in the sphere of rural

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3 John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, (London, 1961), pp 129-30. Coming to Sahabad in 1861 as a Joint Magistrate Beames found it hard to reconcile to the administrative conventions in the district. 'Here when a case arose they [local officials] consulted their law books, found the law that applied, passed orders in accordance therewith and troubled themselves no further'.

4 The opinions of the free traders, the business groups and also of some influential economists of the time such as McCulloch have been thus summed up : as a result of removal of the impediments to free trade 'An optimal division of labour-with benefits to all-could then emerge. India would be a more attractive market for British manufactures when money incomes

agrarian relations. In view of a widespread notion that the limited role of the Government in the improvement of the economy, or in its stabilization was to a large extent due to what may be called the colonial theory of poverty, it would be relevant to examine whether the views of the Government of Bengal fit this explanation. The implication of the theory is that since the roots of Indian poverty were in the particular social institutions, the attitudes of the people and certain developments such as large population growth the Government had not much to do about the problem. The dominant version of the theory is that the poverty was scarcely a recent phenomenon, and it dismisses the view of the material and cultural opulence of India before the coming of the Europeans as a myth. Indian economy, it is argued, had been a story of prolonged and uninterrupted stagnation. 'The behaviour of the East India Company may have aggravated a distressing situation, but it could not be held responsible for the basic difficulties. The problem was rooted in the deficiencies of traditional society'.<sup>5</sup> The total and crucial impact of the specific Indian social institutions and of related developments on the economy has been characterized as sheer survival-mindedness, a failure to respond positively to new opportunities, an 'essentially non-economic outlook', and it is partly in terms of this impact that the so-called phenomena, such as the 'shyness' of Indian capital and 'the scarcity of labour in the midst of an obvious labour surplus',<sup>6</sup> have usually been explained.

It is notable that some versions of the colonial theory of poverty did emphasise factors other than the distinctively Indian social institutions, values and the size of the population growth. For instance, James Mill who tended to blame much of the economic stagnation in India on the deficiencies of her society, also emphasized the role in this of the misgovernment of pre-British India,

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were rising there. Moreover, it seemed to be ordained that India's income would be maximized when producers specialized in primary commodities for export. This was indeed the imperialism of free trade'. W. J. Barber, *British economic thought and India, 1600-1858* (Oxford, 1975), p. 192.

5 Views of James Mill as summarised by W. J. Barber, *ibid*, p. 131. See Ch. 8 of the book for a summary of Mill's views.

6. Myrdal characterises the 'colonial labour market theory' as essentially mercantilist. For this interesting point see Myrdal, *op. cit.*, II, 966-973, 977-979. For a recent criticism of the view of the 'shyness' of Indian capital see A. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 19-22.

particularly the tax system which was based on a proportion of the gross product, and the excessiveness of the land revenue demand, as a result of which the peasant lost all will to improve his cultivation, since he was in 'subjection to a rigid government under which the fruits of labour were never secure'.<sup>7</sup>

The agrarian thinking of the Government of Bengal scarcely approximated the usual version of the colonial theory of poverty, though certain elements of the theory were present in this thinking. The Government did not agree with the point of view that its role in agricultural improvement was redundant. The limitations of the role that it actually played were, however, explicable in terms of assumptions and beliefs other than those involved in the colonial theory of poverty. Where, as noted later, the Government disapproved of any direct role of the State in agriculture, the main assumption was not that agriculture was hopelessly stagnant, or that the direct role of the State would not be worthwhile, but that the Bengal peasants were by and large a skilful community, making the best use of the available resources, eagerly responding to all economic stimuli, and that the usual kind of knowledge which the Government was eager to diffuse among the peasants, believing that this was how it could best help the peasants, was largely irrelevant to the usual agricultural practices.

One can identify two diverse strands in the Government thinking. One was the emphasis on the institutional factors in the agricultural backwardness—such as the zamindari system, the increasing rent of peasants, the insecurity of their tenure, the small size of their holdings and the high interest charges on rural credit. The assumptions underlying this trend of thought which constituted, as noted later, the background of the tenancy legislation of the period under review amply refute a recent view that the Mutiny brought about a crucial turn in the official thinking in regard to the propriety of Government interference in property relations.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Quoted in Barber, *op. cit.*, p 132.

8. The Mutiny 'brought about a reversal of the assumptions and premises of British policy in India. In particular, the Mutiny marked an end to the era of British-sponsored change and innovation in the Indian institutional structure. It marked the beginning of a new era of maintenance of status quo in the institutional structure, specially the property structure. Henceforth, the aim of British policy was to explore prospects of growth and development within the given institutional framework'. P. C. Joshi, *Land Reforms in India* (Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1975), pp. 8-9.

Another strand was the emphasis on the large population growth, the institutional questions indicated above being looked upon as mere consequences of this growth. The real problem, according to this school of thought, was underdevelopment. However, in some versions the role of some aspects of agrarian relations in aggravating the effects of population growth was admitted.

How deeply the population question perturbed the contemporary minds is evident from the gloomy statements of some members of the Famine Commission of 1878. 'Far greater than any fears of invasion from the north', James Caird observed, 'is the renewed annual pressure of two and half millions of mouths by the natural increase of population of India itself'.<sup>9</sup> According to him, 'An exhausted agriculture and an increasing population must come to a deadlock. No reduction of the assessment [land revenue] can be more than a postponement of the inevitable catastrophe'.<sup>10</sup>

The tendency of the population to increase fast, it was argued, was nearly irreversible, and the 'catastrophe' this would cause inevitable unless some social institutions, some habits and attitudes of the peoples fundamentally changed. 'The religion, habits and climate', Caird argued, 'impair those qualities of energy and self-denial which are essential to strengthen a nation's power of self-maintenance'. Apart from religion, and the pervasive listlessness of the people, Cunningham also emphasized the role of the contentment of the people 'with the cheapest food' by way of explaining why population would continue to grow. He quoted Ricardo to stress his point: 'In those countries where the labouring classes have the fewest wants, and are contented with the cheapest food, the people are expose to the greatest vicissitudes and miseries . . . they cannot seek safety in a lower situation; they are already so low that they can fall no lower'. Arguing from the premise that in India 'life is so miserable that the prospect of a still lower stage possesses but few terrors. Increasing numbers add to the fierceness of the struggle for existence, and to its hopelessness', Cunningham suggested as the main remedy 'the formation of a standard of life high enough to protect society against its worst sufferings and risks.' According to him,

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9. James Caird, *India, the land and the people* (London, 1884 end), p. 248.

10. 'Report to Her Majesty's Secretary of State on the condition of India'. 31 Oct. 1879. Parl Papers, H.C. 1880; Vol. 53; Paper No C-2732, p. 8.

'The standard can rise only by the general diffusion throughout society of an idea of well-being superior to that which now exists . . . . The only way to this is through the habits and faculties which have placed considerable strata of society in Europe in so favourable a position in these regards—the self-restraint that checks the multiplication of the species where means for its subsistence do not exist,—the prudence that prefers future security to present enjoyment . . . . Till these national tastes and habits are formed, fresh opportunities of wealth may only aggravate existing evils. It is bad enough to have a large agricultural population, living close on the line, where death from want is at all times a possible incident; but the difficulty would be a great deal greater if there were, at a hundred different manufacturing centres, masses of people accustomed to live at an equally low level and exposed to equally great risks of starvation'.<sup>11</sup>

It is striking that while such officials stressed the role of some social institutions and habits of the people in the growth of population and in aggravating the consequences of this growth they entirely ignored how in the context of a more or less subsistence peasant

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11. Cunningham, *British India and its rulers* (London, 1882), pp. 54-57: Cunningham was presumably influenced by modifications of the population theory after Malthus, mainly in regard to interpretation of the concept of bare subsistence, which according to Malthus ultimately limited population growth, and of the relation between its variability and the extent of population growth. Ricardo viewed standard of subsistence as not being a definite level determined by physiological needs, but as being dependent on custom or habit. Malthus later introduced the element of changing habits, but merely as a short-term condition in his population theory. The role of comforts and of acquired wants was later stressed as agents counteracting the tendency of population to grow beyond the means of subsistence. (For detail see E. Whittaker, *Schools and Streams of economic thought*, Chicago, 1960, pp. 133-134). J. S. Mill's view can be taken as being representative of the dominant trend in economic thought on the question by about the middle of the 19th century. 'Whatever the causes by which population is anywhere limited to a comparatively slow rate of increase an acceleration of the rate very speedily follows any diminution of the motives to restraint. . . . Unless, either by their general improvement in intellectual and moral culture, or at least by raising their habitual standard of comfortable living, they can be taught to make a better use of favourable circumstances nothing permanent can be done for them' (*Principles of Political economy*, University of Toronto Press edn. 1965 Bk. 1, Ch. X, See 3).

economy, the particular institution of the extended family system counteracted some of these consequences.<sup>12</sup>

Such officials, however, candidly admitted the role of the particular institutions introduced during British rule in aggravating the general effects of a large population growth. Indeed, one does not find a consistent logic in the official views on the origins of population growth, and on the bearing of different institutions on the effects of this growth. Caird, for instance, stressed the point that 'the pressure on the means of subsistence is rendered more severe by the moral disorganization produced by laws affecting property and debt, not adapted to the condition of the people', and in regard to the temporarily-settled areas, the chief means that he suggested for arresting the agricultural decline was to fix the land revenue demand of the Government. 'The right of private property is the surest foundation of progress, order and liberty'.<sup>13</sup> 'The chief danger of India being over-population', he concluded, 'the true check to that is private property in land'.<sup>14</sup> W. W. Hunter, who like James Mill believed that 'India is, and ever since it came under modern observation has always been a poor country',<sup>15</sup> and traced the 'root of the evil' in the fact that 'Each Hindu marries as a religious duty, and

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12. Such implications of the extended family system have thus been explained by a modern economist: 'The Malthusian theory is formulated in the setting of a more or less developed economy. According to it, with given natural resources and technology, the saturation point in a country's population will be reached when the level of wages, determined by the marginal product of labour, is equal to the minimum subsistence level. But in many underdeveloped countries the problem of population pressure takes place in the setting of the subsistence economy before the development of the money and the wage economy. In this setting with an extended family system, many people whose marginal product is below the subsistence level can continue to exist at that level because the total output from land is shared among the members of the extended family. So, with the same natural resources and technology, the saturation point of population in a subsistence economy is larger than that of a wage economy, because it is determined by the equality of the average product of labour to the minimum subsistence level. Many people who would have been unemployed and starved in a wage economy are maintained in 'disguised' unemployment by their relatives as part of a traditional security system'. (H. Myint, *The economics of the developing countries*, London, 1965 edn. pp. 34-35).

13. Parl. Papers. H.C., 1880, Vol. 53, Paper No C-2732; p. 9.

14. J. Caird, *India the land and the people*, (1884 edn), p. 249.

15. W. W. Hunter, *England's work in India* (London, 1881), p. 58.

that marriage takes place at the close of childhood, quite irrespective of there being any means of subsistence for the young couple',<sup>16</sup> emphasises, in his analysis of the economic implications of the large population growth, the crucial role of the institution of rent. While the pressure of population, by causing discontinuation of the traditional practice of fallowing, and thoughtless deforestation, tended to result in the impoverishment of the soil,<sup>17</sup> and by necessitating shift of cultivation to inferior lands gradually increased the marginal cost of cultivation, it also meant, in the context of the existing system of rent, that the peasant 'has to pay away a larger proportion' of his reduced income to his landlord. Since 'Rent represents, fundamentally, the difference in value between the most profitable and the least profitable lands under cultivation. This is economic theory, and in spite of every effort at limitation by custom or law, the economic theory constantly tends to assert itself in the actual facts', the result of the increasing cultivation of marginal lands was the tendency of rent to rise further.<sup>18</sup>

How to reduce this alleged pressure on the land seemed a difficult question to the Government. Its basic assumption in this was the unalterability and inviolability of the existing framework of the small peasant economy. The argument of an influential school of contemporary economists in Great Britain, with particular reference to Ireland, that the only solution of the problem of Irish agriculture characterized by an extreme pressure of population on the land, lay in the substitution of the English-type capitalist farming for the Irish cottier system scarcely appealed to the Government.<sup>19</sup> Apart from

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16. *ibid.* p. 72. He concluded: 'A crowded population of small cultivators, without capital and with no restraints on marriage, everywhere is, had been, and must be poor'. (p. 72). Further, 'We are compelled to stand by and watch the pitiless operation of economic laws whose force no man can stay'.

17. *ibid.* p. 64. According to him, 'Our real danger in India is not any temporary insolvency of the finances, but a permanent bankruptcy of the soil'.

18. *ibid.* pp. 64, 66.

19. This argument, which remained largely unquestioned till J. S. Mill's time, followed from the economists' method of viewing economic development in terms of the comparative rates of increase of population and capital. No rise in the material standards was possible, it was argued, unless capital growth outstripped population growth, and the development of a capitalist agriculture was regarded as a means to that. The role of this development in checking population growth in Ireland was also stressed at the time. Malthus and his



the serious social disorder which such a process would inevitably cause in Bengal, the Government firmly believed that small peasants, freed from several constraints on their enterprise, were capable of revitalising the agriculture. It was indeed careful not to encourage developments which could weaken the small peasant economy. This is partly evident from its attitude, particularly after the Mutiny, to the question of encouragement of European colonization, particularly where this involved the need to create conditions for a capitalist land relationship, and the distribution of wastelands among the Europeans. The test for the willingness of the Government to adopt the free enterprise doctrine, which was much in the air at the time, came when the Europeans asked for fee-simple rights in the waste land. The Government was not much in sympathy with the idea, since the European control over such lands could violate the existing land rights, whatever the degree of their development. 'A greater part of the uncultivated land of India', the Government judged, 'belongs to villagers and private owners; and these wastes act as a reserve, not only for pasture and grazing, but also for future extension of cultivation, when the occupied lands are fully tilled'.<sup>20</sup> The granting away of the waste lands in fee simple, it also argued, would necessitate increased taxation in order to make up for the loss of potential revenue from this source, and anxious to avoid this taxation it preferred retention of this source of revenue to the growth of European enterprise—a judgement clearly revealing a kind of economic thinking which was utterly inconsistent with the doctrine of capitalist enterprise.

Any 'compulsory' emigration designed to reduce the pressure of population was also judged undesirable, partly on the ground that such mobility was rare in the traditional peasant society. The limited success of the earlier measures to encourage emigration was 'in a great measure due to the strong attachment to their homes which prevails among all classes in India'.<sup>21</sup>

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followers argued that population would fast increase where it appeared easy for the labourer to obtain food and shelter for the family. 'No where did it appear easier than in Ireland, so long as the subdivision of land was permitted'. The system of wage labour, by compelling old cottiers to buy food and rent their cottage, would be a deterrent to improvident marriages, and thus check population growth

20. Despatch (Home, Revenue and Agriculture Department) to the Secretary of State. No 38 of 1880; 8 June, 1880, para 28.

21. *ibid*, para 25.

It is notable that despite its awareness that absence of occupations other than agriculture 'lay at the root of much of the poverty of the people, and of the risks to which they are exposed in seasons of scarcity', and that 'every new opening . . . attracts labour which would otherwise be employed to comparatively little purpose on the land, and thus sets up a new bulwark against the total prostration of the labour market, which in the present condition of the population follows on every severe drought', the Government carefully shunned any direct role in the diversification of the economy through industrialization. It believed that a direct intervention would only hinder the growth of an industrial economy.<sup>22</sup> Its thinking was probably influenced by a classical economic doctrine that industry was limited by capital, and that any State intervention to foster industry without adding to the total capital of the country was bound to fail.<sup>22</sup> The State interference in the industrial sector, as the Famine Commission (1880) also argued, would tend to dislocate the natural mechanism of the market, and thus to prejudice private enterprise. The Government would best promote industrial development by creating conditions under which private enterprise could flourish. The Famine Commission thus argued the point :

'The desired result can only follow upon an increased desire to apply capital to industrial pursuits in India, which again will be a consequence of a growing conviction that adequate profits may be secured on investments, under a condition of continued peace and good government. . . . It will be by indirect means, such as the extension of railways and the development of local trade and foreign commerce, that the end will be attained, rather than by any attempts to give adventitious aid to particular branches of industry. Capital

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22. J. S. Mill has thus explained the doctrine : 'Industry is limited by capital. . . . There can be no more industry than is supplied with materials to work up and food to eat. . . . The people of a country are maintained and have their wants supplied, not by the produce of their present labour, but of past. . . . Yet. . . it long continued to be believed that laws and governments, without creating capital could create industry. . . . Had legislators been aware that industry is limited by capital they would have seen that the aggregate capital of the country not having been increased, any portion of it which they by their laws had caused to be embarked in the newly-acquired branch of industry must have been withdrawn or withheld from some other ; in which it gave, or would have given, employment to probably about the same quantity of labour which it employs in its new occupation'. (*Principles of Political Economy*, Bk. 1, Ch. V, Sec. 1).

will accumulate in the country, or will flow into it for investment in proportion as security is maintained and facilities for obtaining profitable markets for all sorts of produce are enlarged'.<sup>23</sup>

The Commission argued, with special reference to capital investment in Indian railways, that a direct State intervention was scarcely the best means of encouraging capital investment in industries. 'The disinclination to risk such investments has been rather increased than diminished by the system of giving a guarantee of interest at a high rate on the large capital of the great railways. So long as the opportunity was afforded to capitalists to make advantageous investments on a large scale on the security of the State, the inducement to attempt any enterprise without such security must have been greatly diminished'.

In regard to its proper role in agricultural development the Government similarly believed that this role should be primarily confined to the creation of conditions under which private agricultural enterprise could flourish. The decision of the Government not to interfere with the general framework of the small peasant economy inevitably delimited the scope of its activity in this sphere. However, the attitude of the Government in this regard was largely paternalistic, distinguishable from the generally laissez faire attitude to indigenous industries. This paternalism derived partly from the feeling that 'the Government of India is not only a Government, but the chief landlord.... The duties which in England are performed by a good landlord fall in India in a great measure upon the Government. Speaking generally the only Indian landlord who can command the requisite knowledge [in regard to improvement of agricultural resources] is the State'.<sup>24</sup> This conviction was sometimes associated with a bad conscience that The Government had scarcely done what it should have done. Mayo thus wrote to a friend in a self-critical mood: 'I have only one object in all I do .... I believe we have not done our duty to the people of this land. Millions have been spent on the conquering race, which might have been spent in enriching and in elevating the children of the soil'.<sup>25</sup> The feeling that

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23 Parl. Papers. H.C. 1880, Vol. 52, Paper No. C-2735. 'Report of the Famine Commission', 1880, pt. II, p 175.

24. Mayo's letter to the Secretary of State (1870) quoted in John Strachey, *India* (London, 1888), p 254

25. Quoted in W. W. Hunter, *A life of Earl of Mayo*, (London, 1876) Vol 2, p. 256

the State had an important role to play in agricultural improvement was reinforced by its increasing awareness of the desertion of responsibilities by wealthier sections of society in this regard. 'In a country of small cultivators like India', as the Famine Commission argued, 'where the wealthier landowners take little personal interest in the details of improved husbandry, a necessity is laid upon the State to set before the people examples of better practice'.<sup>26</sup>

The investment by the Government in irrigation<sup>27</sup> was partly a result of this conviction. The teachings of the economists, which presumably influenced to a certain extent the Government's attitude to the question of promoting indigenous industries through direct State intervention, fully endorsed this role. Adam Smith listed among the duties of the Sovereign 'that of erecting and maintaining those public institutions and those public works, which, though they may be in the highest degree advantageous to a great society, are, however, of such a nature that the profit could never repay the expense to any individual or a small number of individuals, and which it therefore cannot be expected that any individual or a small number of individuals should erect or maintain'.<sup>28</sup> In the first half of the 19th century there were two broad trends of economic thought in regard to public works. Orthodox economists envisaged public works as part of the necessary infrastructure of a free exchange economy, to be built up in order to give full scope to the natural forces of economic development. Economists who were unorthodox enough to see employment as an end which must be deliberately sought looked upon public works as a valuable means of achieving it, regarding the possibility of an economic development in the process as an additional advantage.<sup>29</sup>

Of public works the Bengal Government considered irrigation as most vital for agricultural improvement, and in a country like Bengal, the Government argued, where no collective enterprise existed in this regard, except in some regions, the State investment in irrigation was

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26. *Report of the Famine Commission*, op. cit., p. 138.

27. For detail, see B. B. Chaudhuri, 'Agricultural production in Bengal : co-existence of decline and growth, 1850-1900', in *Bengal Past and Present*, July-Dec, 1969, Section 3d

28. A. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Bk V, Ch. 1, Pt. 111.

29. For detail see R. D. C. Black, *Economic thought and the Irish land question*, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 162-64

all the more imperative. Whatever private enterprise was forthcoming was far below the mark, mainly because it was primarily motivated by considerations of private profit. 'It is on direct State action alone', the Famine Commission concluded, 'that any reliance can be placed for the extension of irrigation. It is hardly conceivable that the intervention of capitalists, solely interested in earning the largest dividend possible, between the agricultural community and the water supply available for irrigation could ever be arranged on a satisfactory basis'.<sup>30</sup> The Government, the Commission argued, should therefore give up the narrow outlook which regarded the question of irrigation primarily from the point of view of a quick and net return on its investment, particularly in the extent of the recurring famines resulting mainly from drought, which amply demonstrated the overriding importance of irrigation as a source of stability for agriculture.

The Government believed it had a useful role to play in yet another sphere where also private enterprise had been nearly absent so far: agricultural researches, 'investigation of husbandry', as Mayo called it, and the diffusion of the new knowledge derived from these among the peasants. The feeling was widespread among the official circle that the indigenous agricultural methods were imperfect and that application of science could help peasants improve their skill. The State had an indispensable role to play in this since private initiative was scarcely forthcoming, unlike in Europe where 'progress in this direction' had been made possible through 'private effort' and 'the application of the intelligence of the agricultural classes themselves'.<sup>31</sup> In India 'We cannot expect to obtain in this way any great results. The work that is performed by the great Agricultural Societies of Europe must be performed in India by the Government or not at all'.

The context of the formulation of the ideas about the proper role of the State in this, and the nature of the ideas themselves changed over the years. The context of Mayo's ideas were largely European needs—needs connected with European investment in India, or with the supply of some basic raw materials from India for European industries. Some Europeans, while enthusiastic about

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30. *Report of the Famine Commission*, op. cit., p. 155

31. Mayo's views quoted in W. W. Hunter, *A life of the Earl of Mayo*, Vol 2, p. 324.

investment in India, were deterred by the absence of precise information about the state of Indian agricultural products—their varieties and the prospects of their improvement. On the other hand 'Manchester was demanding a larger supply of cotton, with a longer staple'. Mayo, whose Viceroyalty, as Hunter put it, 'witnessed the final breakwater established between any lingering tradition of official jealousy of the 'interloper' and the free opening of India to British enterprise under the Crown'<sup>32</sup> was naturally eager to provide such information and the create favourable conditions which would enable Indian peasants to grow the kind of crops which Europeans needed. The role of the Government, Mayo thought, should be largely confined to 'the practical exhibition of the results' of scientific experiments, since it 'cannot with advantage attempt to carry on any of the operations of agriculture', though 'it may often be the duty of the Government to act as the pioneer to private enterprise'.

The ideas of Hume, Secretary to the Government of India, and of Campbell and Temple, Lieutenant Governors of Bengal, who after Mayo took a keen interest in 'scientific agriculture', considerably differed from Mayo's. They primarily stressed the local needs, and tended to argue in favour of a closer and more effective participation of the administration in this matter. Hume particularly insisted that the inroad of science on old customs should not be abrupt, and did not want experiments which were entirely alien to indigenous practices. The experiments on the 'model farms',<sup>33</sup> from which the new knowledge would radiate among the peasants in the neighbourhood, would be 'in general harmony' with the existing practices, 'with only such minor modifications as are patently desirable . . . Each successive year should witness some cautiously introduced improvement'.<sup>34</sup> The 'first thing' for the managers of the farms 'would be to learn the language and agriculture practised in the district in which they were to start their several farms, not to live fine-gentlemen-like in stations, but out in some agricultural villages amongst the people'. Such contacts would be effective only if some peasants could be made to take interest in the experiments, eventually emulate the new methods and diffuse among the common peasants the knowledge thus acquired.

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32. *ibid*, p. 341

33. For a history of these model farms see B. B. Chaudhuri, 'Agricultural production in Bengal; co-existence of decline and growth, 1850-1900', *op. cit.*, Section, 3e.

34. *India Agriculture and Horticulture Progs.*, Nov 1871, No. 33.

The approach of the Government in this was frankly elitist. Hume would choose for the purpose 'sons of well-to-do cultivators, peasant proprietors and the like', and Campbell 'an improving body or ryots'.<sup>35</sup>

Eden sharply disagreed with his predecessors, doubted the usefulness of the model farms, and indeed tended to ridicule them. 'These agricultural and statistical experiments remind me of Pantagruel's inspection of the occupations of the Courtiers of Quintessence, Queen of Entelechie'.<sup>36</sup> The model farm experiments, he argued, were conducted by people who were utter strangers to the peasant society, and the experiments remained largely irrelevant to its needs. Apart from this Eden questioned the fundamental assumption of his predecessors that the agricultural methods and practices of Bengal peasants were backward.

'The Bengal ryot... knows nothing of the scientific agriculture and the analysis of soil, but he probably knows, at least as well as any other Indian peasants, how to get the most out of his land, and he has shown himself keen to adopt new staples and extend the cultivation of old whenever the market demand has taught him that this is for his interest. He cannot, however, alter the conditions of soil and climate under which he labours, as those doctrinaire advisers would seem to expect who urge him to grow rice as in Carolina and sugar as in Jamaica'.<sup>37</sup>

Eden did agree that they had a lot to learn 'in the matter of preparing, for a foreign market, raw produce common to other countries with India'. However, here again peasants could best be helped by private agencies, and State interference could be pernicious in its effects.

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35. Bengal Agriculture Progs, Aug 1873, File 38-2; Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to Dacca Commissioner, 21 Aug, 1873, para 4.

36. India Agriculture and Horticulture Progs, March 1880, No. 49. Confidential Minute of Eden, 20 Nov. 1879, para 34. Eden then quotes the following passage from Rabelais: 'Others in a large grass plot exactly measured how far the fleas could go at a hop, a step, and a jump, and told us that this was exceeding useful for the ruling of kingdoms, the conduct of armies and the administration of Commonwealths, and that Socrates, who first got philosophy out of heaven, and from idle and trifling made it profitable and of moment, used to spend half his philosophising time in measuring the leaps of fleas, as Aristophanes the Quintessential affirms'.

37. *ibid*, No. 49, 1880 Govt. of Bengal to Govt of India, 22 Jan, 1880, para 6

'State interference is always viewed with suspicion by the people, and it is wanting not only in the power of inspiring popular confidence, but in special knowledge, commercial connection, acquaintance with the fluctuations of the market, sufficiency of capital, simplicity of organization, the stimulus of self-interest and many other important conditions. It has always the fatal fault of interfering with private enterprise and driving away capital'. The proper role of the Government, Eden argued, would be to create conditions under which private enterprise could prosper. The Government 'can do immense good by aiding private enterprise, by opening up the country, by inspiring confidence in its power to protect property and secure justice, and by affording facilities for the acquisition of land'.

This was, however, far from the dominant trend of thought in the official circle. John Strachey, a member of the Viceroy's Council, criticised Eden's version as 'a defence of ignorance'. Rivers Thompson, another member, pointed out the failure of Bengal peasants to produce rice, sugarcane and other crops as profitably as peasants in other countries, attributed this to the imperfect method of cultivation in Bengal, and stressed the possible role of the model farms in the improvement of such methods. With the coming of Thompson as the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal the school of thought advocating an increasing role of the State in agricultural improvement was naturally strengthened. Apart from the experiments in the model farms Thompson stressed the need for collection of agricultural statistics, particularly in the context of the plans of the Government for revising the country's rent and tenancy laws. The Famine Commission also emphasized it, and the weight of support of such an authority further strengthened this school of thought.

### 3 : *A more active role in the regulation of relations of zamindars and peasants.*

The intervention of the Government to regulate by law the the relations of zamindars and peasants constitutes a significant fact of the agrarian history of Bengal in the period under review. While in the long period between 1793 and 1858 Government rigidly followed a policy of non-interference, two laws—the Rent Act X of 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act VIII of 1885—were passed in our period, and the rent question was one of the outstanding issues that agitated the official mind since the peasants' revolt in Pabna in 1873.



3a : *Reasons of the non-interference of the Government in the relations of planter—zaminders and peasants, unless where such relations affected 'Law and Order'.*

In view of this increasing concern for the peasantry, it is, however, striking that the Government took no active steps to regulate the relations of indigo planters and indigo cultivators. The categorical assertion by the Government that it lay entirely with the peasants to decide whether to cultivate indigo or not and that the compulsory cultivation of indigo was illegal was undoubtedly reassuring to the peasants during their revolt in 1859-60.<sup>38</sup> This was, however, by no means a new attitude on the part of the Government towards indigo cultivation. They had never asserted that the compulsory cultivation of indigo was lawful.

The Government policy of non-interference in regard to indigo was not due to any ignorance on its part of the evils of the indigo system. The Indigo Commission (1860) severely condemned the system. Grant, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, while being accused by the planters of openly encouraging the Indigo peasants' revolt, firmly defended his policy, mainly arguing that the system was fit for destruction. 'On the whole', he wrote to the Secretary of State, 'I think I am not too sanguine in believing that a very rotten and dangerous edifice has fallen to the ground and that by the care taken the fall has been as little destructive as possible'.<sup>39</sup> The planters suffered losses, but there was not much that Grant could do about the matter : 'as a national interest. the owners and the cultivators of the soil must be ranked second to none in an agricultural country like India'. Canning was equally harsh on the indigo system. The indigo contracts, in enforcing which the planters had asked for a special law, were called by him a 'gigantic system of fraud'. 'Really it is worse than slavery, for it is deceit in place of force and it involves honorable men unknowingly', and in view of this he could 'not look upon the emancipation of Lower Bengal from such a system and the changes which will follow that emancipation as other than a great national good'.<sup>40</sup> The official enquiry into the origins of a revolt in

38 B. Chowdhury : *Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal, 1750-1900*, (Calcutta 1964), Vol. I, pp. 201-202.

39. Grant to Wood, 9 August, 1860, Quoted in S. Gopal, *British Policy in India, 1858-1905* (Cambridge, 1965, Indian Edition, 1975), p. 25.

40 Despatch to the Secretary of State, 29 December, 1860, Quoted in S. Gopal, *ibid*, p. 28.

Champaran and Darbhanga (1866-68), similar to the one in Bengal, clearly showed that the Bihar system of indigo cultivation was not any better. Yet the Government was reluctant at the time to do anything more than merely maintain the law and order. Even a man of an extra-ordinary reforming zeal like Campbell refrained from intervention, though he admitted: 'The Bihar indigo system is not altogether a healthy one fairly based on free trade, but it has about it elements of quasi-feudal compulsion'.<sup>41</sup> Another official enquiry in 1876-78 amply confirmed Campbell's judgment, but neither Temple nor Eden did anything towards reforming the system. Temple thought it 'manifestly desirable to leave this matter as much as possible to be settled between the parties, Government merely affording legal protection against duress and coercion'.<sup>42</sup> Eden left it to the new Bihar Indigo Planters Association (1877) to remove the causes of peasants' discontent.<sup>43</sup>

The non-intervention of the Government in the relations of planters and ryots, except when it became a law and order question, was due to several reasons. The Government could not entirely ignore the interests of a number of officials, 'many' members of the India Council, and also 'many senior officials in Bengal' who had invested capital in indigo.<sup>44</sup> During the viceroyalty of Lawrence the powerful opposition of the members of his Council, such as Maine and Trevelyan, was partly due to their conviction that the destruction of the indigo system would be far from an unmixed good. Maine argued, unlike Grant and Canning, that 'the total collapse of the great indigo interest would be not simply a severe wound to the prosperity of India but almost a fatal moral blow to the credit of the Indian Government'.<sup>45</sup>

Campbell thus justified his policy of non-intervention: 'The present indigo system is certainly not one which the Government would encourage or foster if it were a new thing, but it is so established that a change can not be too rapidly forced on without danger

41. Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Aug 1873, File 1-38, Govt of Bengal to Patna Commissioner, 5 Aug 1873, para 3.

42. *Ibid*, Oct. 1876, File 106-5, Govt. of Bengal to Govt. of India, 6, Oct. 1876, para 4.

43. Beng. Jud. Progs., Aug. 1877, Nos. 53-61, A. Eden to Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, 11 April 1877.

44. S. Gopal, *op. cit.* pp. 26, 28.

45. Minute of Maine, 20 May, 1864; Quoted in *ibid*, p. 38.

of serious embroilments and injury to all parties'. Government therefore, 'must rather look to a gradual approach to free trade principles as fast as circumstances will permit'.<sup>46</sup> Such a policy in the subsequent period largely derived from a misconception of the origin of the antagonistic relations of planters and peasants. Even Campbell was not free from it. The Government explained the antagonism by the existing zamindar-ryot relationship. The omnipotent zamindars prevented direct contacts of planters with peasants. This led the planters to take leases of zamindars' estates by paying an enormous price. This big initial expenditure, the Government believed, prevented the planters from paying a remunerative price to the peasants and eventually led them to use coercive methods to make the peasants grow an unremunerative crop: The real solution of the indigo system did not lie, the Government concluded, in the occasional Government intervention whenever troubles had cropped up, but in a reorganisation of the zamindar-ryot relationship in such a way as to make peasants free agents in using their lands in whatever way they liked. The Government believed the contemplated revision in the rent law would make for such a reorganisation.

Such a version was unfounded. True, zamindars demanded a heavy price for leasing their estates to planters. But cases in which planters obtained leases in this way were not many. In Bihar such a formal lease was mostly unnecessary. The planters' control over the management of the estates leased to them derived from their position as their mortgagees. The amount of the loan to the zamindars was often considerable, and till the loan was repaid the creditor-planters had a right to the entire income from the estates. The fact that even in these estates the peasants were not paid a fair price for indigo refuted the assumption of Government.

#### 4: *The background of the Rent Legislation of 1859.*

What led the Government to intervene in the relations of zamindars and peasants? The only attempt at such intervention in the period between 1793 and 1853 was a Regulation proposed by Harrington (28 November 1826) 'for more fully declaring and securing the rights of *koodcasht* [resident] ryots and other permanent undertenants of lands'. The Government discussed the Regulation, but rejected it. The grounds of rejection show how the Government

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46. Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Aug. 1873, File 1-38, Govt. of Bengal to Patna Commissioner, 5 Aug. 1873, para 4.

at that time looked at the question of regulating by law the rent rates of peasants. The Government thought the scheme impracticable: 'To fix the rent which every field shall pay to the landlord . . . would be as absurd as to fix the price of food or the wages of labour'.<sup>47</sup> It seemed to the Government undesirable too. Increasing rent was the product of the developing resources of the country, and Government assumed that 'the ryots in Bengal of the present day have no right to participate in the profits arising out of the limitation of the Government demand'. The Government believed that any law for controlling the rent rate would in fact be superfluous since 'few zamindars were so lost to all sense of their own interests as to raise the demand beyond the ability of the cultivators to pay without detriment to their stock'.

An influential school of thought, best formulated during the debates preceding the revision of the Charter Act of 1813, also argued, presumably under the influence of the theory of wages fund, that the peasants were not unlike labourers, and that the remuneration of labour primarily depended on the size of the existing wages fund. Increasing this remuneration presupposed an increase in the wages fund, which, it was argued, was possible only when agricultural resources improved. The primary requirement for this was increased capital investment, and this capital, it was believed, would largely be provided by European entrepreneurs. An essential condition for this was to create a climate of confidence in the security of this investment, and the role of an efficient judicial system was particularly stressed at the time. Unless this was done, it was concluded, no improvement in the law relating to zamindars and peasants would better the peasants' lot, since in the context of a fixed wages fund an increase in the number of peasants and labourers would inevitably depress the level of wages.

Even before the agitations over the revision of the Charter Act, A. Ross, Fifth Judge, Sadar Diwani Adalawt, who was a believer in the utilitarian doctrines of rent, argued along these lines in his Minute of 6 March 1827 :<sup>48</sup>

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47. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., 29 Jan, 1833, No. 3, Secretary to the Governor General to Government of Bengal, 29 Sept., 1832, para 10.

48. Bengal Judicial (Civil) Progs, 22 March, 1827; Paras 13-14 of the Minute. It is interesting to note how the Government views substantially agreed with those of the protagonists of European Settlement in India—a subject

'In endeavouring to promote the welfare of the cultivating classes it seems to me necessary to keep in mind that the majority of those classes are, and must continue to be, only agricultural labourers. The capitalist, whether zemindar, ijaradar or Mohajon, who advances the money required to defray the expences of cultivation, is the person who receives, and is entitled to receive all that remains of the produce of the land, after deducting the portions which must be allowed to the cultivator for his labour, and to the proprietor for his rent, and we may be assured that the portion of the cultivator will never be more than [what] must be allowed to him in order to obtain his labour, whether the rent charged on the land he cultivates be high or low. If this is the case it must be obvious that the comfort and happiness of the mass of agricultural population, can only be promoted by improving their condition as labourers; and that I apprehend can only be done, by means calculated to raise the demand for their labour'.

The origin of the Rent Act X of 1859 was misunderstood, even by the Government in later years. For instance, Rivers Thompson (Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, 1882-87) thus explained it in 1883 : 'It was only when ... the oppressions of the landlords threatened an agrarian revolution that the Government stepped in by Legislative enactment to arrest the natural increase of rent in Bengal, and the result was the land law of 1859'.<sup>49</sup> There is no evidence that the Rent Act of 1859 was designed to avert an 'agrarian revolution'. It was merely a liberal measure to remove some of the obvious abuses of the existing laws, particularly the ones relating to distraint of crops and properties of peasants for the realisation of arrears of

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widely discussed in England and India on the eve of the revision of the Charter Act.

Alfred Marshall has explained how the relative scarcity of capital, particularly in the continent of Europe in the early 19th century, influenced the kind of thinking which emphasized 'the dependence of labour on the aid of capital'. Economists of the time tended to stress the point that 'all labour requires the support of capital ... and that when anyone works for hire, his wages are, as a rule, advanced to him out of his employer's capital—advanced, that is, without waiting till the things which he is engaged in making are ready for use' (*Principles of Economics*, Macmillan, 8th Edn, Appendix JJ, p 676 )

<sup>49</sup> *Selections from papers relating to the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885* (Calcutta 1920). Speech in the Viceroy's Council, 13 March 1883, p 120

rent.<sup>50</sup> Nearly a decade before the Bill for the amendment of such laws was formally introduced in the Legislative Council of India (10 October 1857) the Collector of Champaran wrote strongly of the need to stop the existing practice of distraint, which he found to have long been an utter perversion of the law of distraint. During his tour of Champaran in 1855 Halliday, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, heard more about it from the Deputy Collector who described to him how 'the unlimited power of distraint ... becomes a tremendous engine of oppression against the ryot'.<sup>51</sup> Halliday saw much of it himself: 'Everywhere during his march . . . in every village and every roadside the Lieutenant Governor was beset by their [ryots'] complaints'.<sup>52</sup> This intimate experience of Halliday had a decisive role in the move by the Government for reforming the rent laws.

The plea for such reform was not confined to the official circle. The Protestant Missionary Societies of Bengal had a significant role in making the whole peasant question an urgent public issue. The condition of the Bengal peasantry was the most important of the social questions discussed in the Conference of the Protestant missionaries in Calcutta (September 4-7, 1855). In two petitions to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (2 September 1856 and 15 December 1856) the Bengal missionaries argued in favour of a 'royal commission to enquire into the conditions of the people of Bengal' comparable to the Devon Commission on Ireland during Peel's administration. In a petition to the House of Commons (11 June 1857) they argued their case more forcibly.

Once the Government had been convinced of the need for a reform in the law, there was nothing to prevent it. Early suggestions for the modification of the distraint law by reducing the powers of zamindars in this respect were invariably rejected on the ground that this would eventually adversely affect the security of the Government revenue, since the Government feared that without these powers

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50. Regulation VII of 1799 and Regulation V of 1812 gave enormous powers to zamindars in regard to distraint of peasants' crops. A mere 'notice' from the zamindar that a peasant was a defaulter was enough for him to proceed to distraint, not only crops, but also personal properties of the defaulter, and the zamindar was assured of the help of the local police against any resistance by the peasant.

51. *Papers relating to the passing of the Rent Act X of 1859*, p. 31.

52. *ibid.*, p. 32.

zamindars would have been unable to punctually collect their rent.<sup>53</sup> There was no ground for such a fear now. The stability of the revenue system was unquestionable. The post-Mutiny 'aristocratic reaction'—that is, the official policy supporting a closer alignment with zamindars for the sake of political security and stability—had no visible impact in Bengal.<sup>54</sup> Bengal escaped the worst effects of the Mutiny, and the Government did not see any point in conciliating

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53. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, 'Agrarian relations in Bengal after the Permanent Settlement, 1793-1819', (Unpublished Calcutta D Phil Thesis, 1958), ch. 5

54. It is sometimes argued that this 'reaction' constituted a crucial orientation in the official thinking, amounting to a rejection of the ideas of the old peasant proprietary school and to a glorification of the principle of an alliance with the landed aristocracy. This alleged swing in the official opinion resulted, we are told, from a conviction that this aristocracy provided the natural leadership of society, a conviction born during the Mutiny which demonstrated to the Government a state of chaos in a society without leaders. An alliance with this aristocracy was looked upon under the circumstances as a guarantee of the stability of British rule.

True that the Mutiny, particularly in Oudh, necessitated a rethinking about the groups with which the Government should conclude land revenue settlements. The absence of any independent role of the Village Community in Oudh, its readiness to assist the rebel talukdars was construed by Canning as an evidence of its near-total disintegration. In fact, to Canning its alliance with the talukdars was nothing less than a betrayal of the trust that the Government had placed on it for long. A feeling was then growing that the Government in view of this should now depend on the powerful talukdars, who had been chastened by their dispossession from their estates, and who had been won over by Canning by the eventual restoration to them of their confiscated estates. There is also evidence that this local experiment in Oudh tended to be elevated to a general principle of universal validity. 'The maintenance of a territorial aristocracy in India, wherever we have such an aristocracy still existing', Canning wrote to the Secretary of State on 25 November, 1859, 'is an object of so great importance, that we may well afford to sacrifice to it something of a system which, whilst it has increased the independence and protected the rights of the cultivator of the soil and augmented the revenue of the State, has led more or less directly to the extinction or decay of the old nobility of the country'. (Parl Papers. House of Commons, 1865, Vol. 40, paper no 62, p. 144). The Oudh Settlement was popular in England, partly because the concept of aristocratic leadership was attractive to the contemporary English mind which under the influence of Bagehot's liberalism did not think aristocratic role inconsistent with liberal philosophy. A major factor in the strength of the aristocratic reaction was the support of a powerful group connected with European capital invested in India in the past and with the contemplated European colonization at the time.

(Foot Note continued)

the zamindar class, already firmly entrenched in power. Zamindars themselves did not in a body oppose the proposed reform in the law. Certain sections of the Bengali intelligentsia warmly supported the move for this reform. In spite of its reluctance to 'join the senseless cry against the zamindars', the *Hindoo Patriot* hailed the Rent Bill and believed that its enactment would mark a new era in the social history of Bengal.<sup>55</sup> The Government itself did not hesitate to pass the Rent Act in view of its extremely modest scope. The Act did not assert any new principle. The Government merely intended, as its Preamble stated, 'to re-enact, with certain modifications, the provisions of the existing law'.

In fact the Act was more than a mere attempt at codification. Its novelty consisted in selection, emphasis and clarification. In some cases the clarification resulted in the introduction of new norms, and

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As a result, 'After the Mutiny', as John Strachey observes, 'there came a flood of reactionary opinions and all the experience of the past seemed forgotten'. (*India*, London 1888; pp. 251-52). 'Theories of land tenure', as a later despatch to the Secretary of State (21 March, 1882) recalled, 'which were unfavourable to tenant right as being an impediment to the free disposal of property were advocated in Lower Bengal, on behalf of great European interests, and elsewhere, as coincident with political expediency. The relation between landlord and tenant began to be regarded purely as one of contract'. However, the emotional force behind such ideas was soon spent up, and their impact on the official policy beyond Oudh was negligible. Even in Oudh the Settlement was upheld, against much criticism, not because of any intrinsic superiority of the system, but because of the fear that its rejection would revive the chaos which prevailed during the Mutiny. The entire philosophy behind the 'aristocratic reaction' was questioned before long in some quarters. In a Minute (5 July, 1862), John Lawrence (a member of the India Council at the time) considered the role of the growth of a middle class connected with land far more crucial in the stability of British rule. 'Facilities', he argued, 'should exist for the growth of a middle class in India, connected with land without, dispossessing the present yeomen and peasant proprietors'. (Parl. Papers. H. C., 1862, Vol. 40, Paper no 431). By way of stressing the same point Wood's Revenue Despatch to India (9 July, 1862) argued: 'It is on the content of the agricultural classes, who form the bulk of the population that the security of the Government mainly depends. If they are prosperous any casual outbreak on the part of other classes or bodies of men is much less likely to become an element of danger, and the military force, and its consequent expense, may be regulated accordingly'. That the idea of aristocratic reaction was losing ground was finally demonstrated in the Punjab where the aristocratic party, failed to overthrow the peasant proprietary settlement.

55. *The Hindoo Patriot*, 15 Oct. 1857.



with changes in objective circumstances the law acquired new meanings. The main provisions of the Act are as follows. Two major reforms were effected. Zamindars could not any longer compel the attendance of peasants at their courts (*Kachchhari*) for the adjustment of rent, 'or for any other purpose'. Distraint was illegal for arrears of more than one year's standing or where the peasants provided security for their payment. The more important provisions were those relating to the rent question. Ryots were classified into three groups : ryots holding at fixed rates ; occupancy ryots and non-occupancy ryots. Ryots holding land at a rate unchanged for 20 years before the date of rent-suits brought against them by zamindars belonged to the first group. Zamindars could not enhance their rent. Any ryot who 'has cultivated or held land' for a period of 12 years was an occupancy ryot, as long as he paid rent. Zamindars could enhance their rent only where their cultivation had increased, or where the rent rate paid by them was lower than what was called the *pargana* rate (the prevailing rate for lands of a particular quality), or where the value of the produce had increased. These legal restraints would not apply where occupancy ryots agreed, by a written contract, to pay an enhanced rent. Ryots without the right of occupancy were not protected by the law.

Two new things in the Act were the criterion of occupancy right and the permissibility of enhancement of rent on the ground of the increased value of the produce. The right of occupancy itself was a known concept. What was new was its qualification by the so-called 12-year rule. This qualification was the result of a genuine misunderstanding on the part of Government of the local customs in the North Western Provinces relating to the right of occupancy. The original Bill (1857) treated all 'resident ryots', as distinguished from migratory ryots (*paikhost*), as occupancy ryots. The Select Committee considering the Bill later introduced the 12-year rule on the basis of some reports that such had been the universal custom in the North Western Provinces, though the Government there had not a consistent view on the question.<sup>56</sup> The 12-year rule turned out in

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56. W. Muir, Secretary to the Government, N.W.P., thought it 'fallacious' that every resident ryot should have the right of occupancy. (*Papers relating to the passing of the Rent Act X of 1859*, p. 81) The Senior Member of the Board of Revenue, N. W. P., however, observed : 'Practically according to the usage of the country . . . the inherent right of occupancy of the resident and non-resident ryot is the same, provided always that both are under the common bond of fealty to the landowner'. (*ibid.*, p. 78).

fact to have been a local practice of allowing an ousted ryot a summary process for recovering his holding on proving his continuous occupation of it for 12 years.

It is surprising that the second novelty in the Act i.e., enhancement of rent on the ground of the increased value of the produce, which was later regarded by the Government of Bengal 'as the germ of all future trouble', attracted very little attention at the time. It was included only in the final Bill. The papers consulted by the Select Committee on the Rent Bill suggest the existence of a school of thought which argued in favour of it from the beginning of the discussion over the Bill. For instance, Raikes, a Judge of the Sadar Diwani Adalat, believed: 'The zamindar ... is the party entitled to derive benefit from any rise in the value of land consequent on the increase in the price of landed products'.<sup>57</sup> The Bengal Board of Revenue also argued against 'any attempt on the part of Government to interfere with the market price of land and to compel the zamindar to grant *pottahs* at the *pargana* rate'.<sup>58</sup> Charles Currie, Officiating Collector of Bulandsahar, argued from a wider perspective. He assumed the natural variability in the rent rate 'according to the habits of industry and frugality of the cultivators, and the amount of capital expended in the cultivation', since he believed rent was 'the surplus profits of land after deducting the wages of labour, and the interest of capital expended on the land'. In view of this, he concluded, 'any attempt arbitrarily to determine the rent of land is ... liable to obstruct the development of the resources of the country'. He particularly emphasised the probable adverse effects of such an attempt on the European settlement in the country, which was an urgent issue before the Government at the time. European capitalists, prohibited by the law from demanding a rent rate higher than the one 'demanded by indolent and careless landlords, who never spent an anna on the improvement of the land', would naturally be discouraged from improving their own lands. An arbitrary limitation of the rent rate would thus be a 'complete bar' to the introduction of European capital in the country'.<sup>59</sup>

This was, however, the opinion of a minority group. The inclusion in the Bill of the new ground of enhancement of rent is

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57. *ibid.*, pp. 48-49, Minute of 17 June 1858.

58. *ibid.*, p. 87, letter of 1 December 1858.

59. *ibid.*, pp. 81-82, Currie's (undated) letter was enclosed in the letter of the Board of Revenue, N.W.P., to Governor General, 26 March 1858.

no indication that the Select Committee agreed with the arguments of the group. The new ground of enhancement of rent was merely intended as a guide to the revenue officers trying rent suits.

*5 : Examination of a recent view on the origins of Act X of 1859.*

A recent view<sup>60</sup> on the origins of the Rent Act of 1859 has emphasized the bearing of the indigo question in general on the movement in favour of a revision in the existing rent laws. The planters, it is argued, 'paved the way' for the Act. 'As the planters came to occupy ryoti jotes in larger number in the fifties and changed from nij to ryoti cultivation, the protection of ryot's occupancy became paramount to them'. The Act 'was the outcome of the planters' sustained pressure on the Government ever since 1830, though at the final stage the cause was caught up in the wider issues of all-round agricultural development'. The indigo question is said to have influenced the official thinking also indirectly. By way of explaining why despite their awareness of the imperfections of the country's landlaws and of the gross abuses of such laws by the zamindars the Government had not intervened so far the author argues: 'The problem of distribution of agricultural profits and capital formation at the level of the primary producers, did not enter the heads of officials as long as they were obsessed with the entrepreneurial halo round the planters and their supposed ability to transplant capitalist farming in a small peasant economy'. The convictions of the Government about the inadvisability of delaying the revision of the existing rent laws were reinforced by urgent economic considerations. 'Expansion of free trade demanded firmer and closer linkage with the empire. Even the remotest corner in Bengal had to be harnessed to produce for the world market and receive western wares'. In this context capital formation at the grass root level was a necessity to help the small rural capitalists to develop resources for export on a national scale and restore purchasing power to the countryside. The occupancy ryots . . . were chosen as the new agency for a silent agrarian revolution'. The urgency of the choice of this particular agency was all the greater, since much to the disappointment of the Government 'the planters petered out as an entrepreneurial agency in the moffusil'.

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60. C Palit : *Tensions in Bengali Rural Society* (Calcutta 1975), pp. 4-5 ; 139, 176-178, 199-200.

In view of the general attitude of the planters to the question of peasants' right in the land, the view that they 'paved the way' for the Act of 1859 seems surprising. It is notable that the school of thought which after the Mutiny argued in favour of European colonization and investment, with which the Bengal planters were largely in sympathy, invariably looked upon firm tenant rights as an obstacle to the contemplated European enterprise. It is also revealing how soon after the passing of Act X of 1859 the planters bitterly criticised it as a serious encroachment on the zamindars' position and how they took the first initiative in asking for legislative measures toward restricting the occupancy rights of peasants. It is not clear from the author's analysis how a stable occupancy right of peasants would help planters. Their primary concern was to make ryots cultivate part or whole of their holdings with indigo, and unless the planters held land as occupancy ryots, a status accounting for only a negligible portion of the total indigo cultivation, it made little difference to them whether peasants had secure occupancy rights or not, particularly where such rights merely ensured a certain protection against an increase of rent. Where zamindars wanted to get rid of indigo cultivation altogether, occupancy rights could scarcely stand in the way, and the growth of indigo cultivation shows that the planters were only rarely baffled by how zamindars behaved with their ryots. The planters could have bargained from a stronger position only where peasants had been given such rights as would enable them to deal directly with the planters. Anyway, the powers by which zamindars could prevent, if they chose, such direct contacts only partly derived from the law.

It would be wrong to mix up the indigo planters with the 'free traders' in England at the time, who, interested in the expansion of the market of European wares in India, stressed the need for protecting the peasants against indiscriminate exactions by zamindars and others as a means of increasing the purchasing power of the peasant community.

However, the general arguments of the free traders do not seem to have appreciably affected the agrarian thinking of the Government of Bengal. The movement of the free traders was aimed primarily against monopoly in any of its forms and direct State intervention in economic affairs. The Indian tax system was criticised by them as an instance of such an intervention, and they were particularly bitter against the excessive revenue demand by the State.

The observation of the Liverpool East India and China Association that 'the land tax or rent paid by the cultivators of the soil is excessive; that it is injurious to the commercial and agricultural interests of that country'<sup>61</sup> was mainly based on the assumption that the indian tax system had 'diverted too much purchasing power from the private sector and thus frustrated the healthy development of market'.<sup>62</sup> While criticising the fiscal system the free traders were in fact far more concerned with the heaviness of the revenue demand in the temporarily-settled areas than with the zamindars' exactions in some provinces such as the Bengal Presidency. Furthermore, the free traders scarcely constituted a homogeneous group. Curiously enough, while the school of thought which argued in favour of European colonization, on the assumption that it was only the Europeans who could provide the massive capital required to harness the productive potential of the country, and to broaden and diversify the country's export base, asked for an invariable and low land revenue and for free-simple rights, it tended to consider firm peasants rights as an obstacle in the way of European enterprise.

The argument that it was the end of the 'obsession' of the Government with 'the entrepreneurial halo round the planters' that made them mindful of the needs of the peasantry is also not convincing. The assumption that the Government lost faith in the regenerative role of the indigo system in the peasant economy only in the late 1850s is evidently unfounded. Indeed, the Government scarcely ever believed that the indigo system, which affected only a small part of the total cultivation in Bengal, though in some particular districts such as Nadia and Jessore the size of the indigo cultivation was quite big, could regenerate the entire peasant economy, or that the working of the indigo system made legal protection of peasant rights altogether redundant.

The emphasis that the Government, while intending to provide some legislative protection to peasants, had in mind the idea of 'a silent agrarian revolution', and that the motive behind promoting such a revolution was to ensure the necessary capital formation in order 'to help the small rural capitalists to develop resources for export on a national scale and restore purchasing power to the country side' is

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61. *Parl. papers*, 1852-53, Vol. 28; p. 238—Quoted in W. J. Barber, *British Economic thought in India, 1600-1858* (Oxford, 1975), p. 191

62. W. J. Barber, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

apt to mislead. Government did believe that peasants, if effectively protected against exactions of zamindars, could plan the allocation of their resources more efficiently, responding to market opportunities more promptly than before. It is, however, an altogether different thing to argue that the dominant frame of reference of the Government thinking was Bengal's international economy.

6 : *Circumstances leading to the revision of Act X of 1859 :*

*Initial reactions of zamindars.*

The Act of 1859 was substantially modified after 26 years—in 1885 by Bengal Tenancy Act VIII. Circumstances leading to the Act of 1885 were far more complex than those responsible for the Act of 1859.

The Act of 1859, an attempt at limiting the powers of zamindars in relation to their ryots, naturally scared the zamindars. Jay Krishna Mukherji, a zamindar of Uttarpura in Hugli, called the Act a 'peril' to the whole foundation of the Permanent Settlement.<sup>63</sup> It is notable that his argument that the new legislation constituted a threat to the Permanent Settlement was scarcely based on any recent experience of his, but on an apprehension about how things would take shape in future. He particularly resented the constraints on the increase of an occupancy ryot's rent. He feared that this would largely destroy the zamindar's incentive to invest in agriculture, and that because of the inability of the majority of peasants to invest at all 'the flourishing and prosperous estates of Bengal will soon be reduced' to a state of 'wretchedness'.<sup>64</sup> But the scare did not produce any organised move on the part of the zamindars to secure the revision of the Act. Some zamindars<sup>65</sup> complained to the Government of the abolition of their power to compel the attendance of ryots at their courts and of the change in regard to the method of distraint, and tried to persuade the Government to revoke these changes by saying that the consequent diminution of their 'moral influence' would seriously impede the collection of rent and eventually depreciate the market value of their estates. The Government dis-

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63. *The Permanent Settlement Imperilled* by a Lover of justice, (Calcutta, 1860).

64. For detail see Nilmoni Mukherjee : *A. Bengal Zamindar* (Cal. 1975), pp. 258-260.

65. Beng. Board of Revenue Progs., 3 May 1861, No. 128, 'Petition of the zamindars and the landholders of zillah Nuddea', 22 March 1861.

missed these arguments as entirely 'speculative'.<sup>66</sup> Nowhere, it was argued, did the collection of rent suffer. In very many estates, which were ably managed, the punctual collection of rent scarcely depended on the exercise of the old kind of coercions which Act X of 1859 had abolished. Nor were more estates sold than usual. Where such sales occurred, it was pointed out, the price convincingly refuted the prediction about the depreciation of zamindari estates in the market.

In fact the alarm of the zamindars gradually diminished. This was partly due, in some places, to the continued exercise by the zamindars, despite the Act, of their old powers. This was possible largely because of the wide gap between the law and the local administrative practice. The old attitude of *laissez faire* died hard. As Joint Magistrate of Sahabad (1861) Beames expressed to the District Collector his concern over the welfare of the peasantry, and 'suggested intervention in cases where they were oppressively treated by the zamindars'. He thus wrote of the Collector's reactions: 'he laughed at me and told me it was no business of ours; the zamindar had a right to do what he liked with his ryots. My Panjabi zeal was in fact laughed down by all the Bengal men'.<sup>67</sup> Jay Krishna Mukherji of Uttarpara admitted that peasants were largely ignorant of the new Act. To that extent the 'peril' of which he was afraid was not real. Some zamindars also candidly admitted that they knew how to subdue refractory ryots, their main device being to win over the leaders, through persuasion, or more often through offers of pecuniary advantages of different kinds.<sup>68</sup>

There is, however, no doubt that the Act resulted in limiting the exercise by zamindars of their old arbitrary powers.<sup>69</sup> But yet it was far from a 'peril' to the foundation of the Permanent Settlement. Analysing the existing rent suits Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Sub-divisional Officer, Barripore, 24-Parganas, concluded: 'that law is in itself not a law of socialistic and revolutionary tendencies'.<sup>70</sup>

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66 *ibid.*, No. 130, Board of Revenue to the Govt. of Bengal, 3 May 1861, para 22.

67. Beames, *op cit.*, p. 129.

68. C. Palit; *op. cit.*, p. 187.

69 Before Act X of 1859 most of the illegal acts of zamindars in connection with the increase of rent were perpetrated under the cover of the legal right by which zamindars, for the settlement of rent accounts, could compel the attendance of their ryots at their courts (*kachchhari*) or arrest them.

70 Bengal Board of Revenue Progs., 21 Nov. 1865, No 62, para 16

7 : *Move on the part of European planters for the  
revision of Act X of 1859*

In the early 1860's the Act affected far more deeply the relations of the planter-zamindars and their ryots, and the first initiative for its revision was mainly theirs. The planters were from the beginning bitter about the Act, and condemned it as 'the foundation of the ruin of every zamindar and *talookdar* of Bengal'. Larmour, Manager of the Bengal Indigo Company, believed the Act would 'eventually destroy my influence over the ryots. The zamindar has heretofore possessed a certain degree of feudal right in which he has had the support of the Government; that right will be completely set aside'.<sup>71</sup> Under normal circumstances the planters would not have faced greater difficulties than indigenous zamindars. But the revolt of the indigo peasants made all the difference. The planters planned to retaliate upon the rebel peasants by enhancing their rent as far as the law allowed. But it was not an easy task, since the peasants united to resist it. This led the planters to want the Act of 1859 revised. The planters claimed very wide powers: 'A landholder in Bengal should have the same power of distraining on his ryots' land, the same facilities for recovering his rents as a landholder in Middlesex is afforded by the laws of England'.<sup>72</sup> They suggested some specific changes. The Act permitted peasants in disputes with zamindars over the rate and amount of rent to deposit with the Collector heir due rent at the existing rate. The planters wanted this provision repealed, since they argued: 'This would be putting the landholders altogether on one side'.<sup>73</sup> They were eager to measure all the lands of the peasants in order to enhance their rent. The Act did not make compulsory the presence of peasants at such measurements. They wanted a specific legal provision to this end. They asked for a more efficient process than the existing one for the realisation of arrears of rent 'by the attachment of all the property of the ryot'. They also wanted the occupancy right of peasants abolished. What a planter valued most, as a Nadia planter James Hills put it, was 'security against the introduction of interlopers into his property without his sanction and approval'.

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71. *Report of the Indigo Commission* (1860) Answers 2265-66

72. Larmour, *Notes on the rent difficulties in Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1862).

73. *Beng. Jud. Progs.*, April 1861, No. 32, Planters' Deputation before the Viceroy, March 1861.



The Government rejected all the suggestions. It was, however, the suits brought by the planters for enhancing the rent of their rebel ryots on the ground of the increased value of the produce that revealed to the Government for the first time some imperfections in the Act, and gave it a foretaste of the future trouble over this apparently innocuous ground of rent enhancement. At the time the substantive law was not changed, but for the first time the possible implications of some provisions of the Act were thoroughly discussed, and the discussion created a feeling that a revision of the Act would soon have been necessary. The basic imperfection in the Act now revealed was that while it permitted zamindars a share in the increased value of the produce, it did not lay down any precise rule for the determination of the size of the share. The principle propounded by Chief Justice Peacock in the case *Hills Vs Issur Ghose* (1862)—a typical rent suit brought by planters—was quite revolutionary.<sup>74</sup>

It was in the course of the debate over the suitability of this principle to the particular agrarian situation in Bengal that Government for the first time recognised the need for revising the Act of 1859. While reviewing the case in 1863 the Chief Justice referred to it 'as an example of the difficulties which have been created by some provisions of the Act, and of the vast amount of litigation, harassing both the landowners and ryots, which must necessarily arise unless that Act be amended'. The Government, however, decided not to change the law, arguing that it would be no use changing the Act without changing its fundamental principles and that the Government did not feel time was ripe for such a fundamental change.

The Act was not revised, but Peacock's principle was soon challenged from various quarters, and it seems certain that but for the reversal of Peacock's decision by the Full Bench of the High Court, the Government would have made a special law for rejecting it. Peacock's judgment denied to the occupancy ryot 'any interest in the land which gives him a right to a share of the rent'. He had, the Judgement said, 'merely a right to occupy the land in preference to any other tenant so long as he pays a fair and equitable rent'.<sup>75</sup> The

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74. *Report of the Government of Bengal on the proposed amendment of the Law of landlord and tenant in that province.* (Calcutta, 1881), Vol. I, Appendix No. I, Para 7.

75. *Papers relating to the working and amendment of the Act X of 1859,* (Calcutta. 1883), pp. 1-2.

Government of Bengal criticised the Judgement as inconsistent 'with the received theory of land rent in India, with the whole course of legislation down to 1859 and with the intention of those who passed Act X of that year', since it left 'no room for distinction between a fair and equitable rent and a rack-rent i.e., the highest rent that any one may be found willing to give for the land'. The rent of occupancy ryots, 'under the ancient law of the country', it was argued, did not depend upon what the land is worth to cultivate or upon the excess of the value of the gross produce over the wages of the ryot, and the profits of his stock, but rather upon local usage'.<sup>76</sup> Lawrence, Viceroy at the time, felt strongly over it, and was ready for a 'tough fight' with the antagonists of peasants' rights.<sup>77</sup> Trevelyan, Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council, wrote to Wood, Secretary of State: 'He [Peacock] had disenfranchised and reduced to the state of tenants-at-will the great body of Bengal ryots'.<sup>78</sup> Henry Maine, Law Member of the Viceroy's Council, and Wood also defended the rights of peasants, though such a defence was inconsistent with their economic assumptions.<sup>79</sup> Their main concern was to preserve an established order which Peacock's principle threatened to overthrow.

8 : *Attitude of the Government of Bengal to the question of revision of the rent laws, 1870—1879*

Subsequent developments reinforced the need for a revision of the Rent Act. Zamindars, at first indifferent to the use of the new ground of rent enhancement, increasingly made use of it, though they often intended the resultant rent-suits as a means of harassing their refractory ryots. But the Rule of Proportion enunciated in a Judgement of 1864, by which the size of the enhanced rent was determined, was often practically unworkable, particularly after the transference of rent suits from revenue officers to the Civil courts in

76. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3, Govt. of Bengal to Govt. of India, 21 Sept. 1863.

77. B. Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence* (Thomas Nelson & sons, London) p. 520.

78. Letter of 8 Sept. 1863, quoted in T. R. Metcalf, 'Struggle over landlord right in India, 1860-68' in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, May 1962.

79. Wood wrote to Lawrence: 'it certainly is true that the right (of occupancy) is not very good, according to the principles of sound political economy'. (*ibid.*). Maine wrote to Wood: 'I should be inclined to abolish occupancy rights altogether as a future institution' (*ibid.*).

1869.<sup>80</sup> Zamindars, failing thus to enhance rent by legal means, sought to make up for the loss by illegal exactions, enforced in several cases by illegal means—a point established by an official enquiry into illegal cesses during Campbell's administration. This tended further to embitter the relations of zamindars and ryots. The revolt of the Pabna peasants in 1873 and its quick spread to other districts was the first clear evidence to the Government of this.<sup>81</sup>

Campbell, however, was still reluctant to reconstruct the Rent Act on new lines. His stand on the question was not consistent. He argued first that revision was unnecessary, and secondly that it was inexpedient.

But if revision was unnecessary the point whether it was expedient or not was irrelevant. It seemed unnecessary to him because 'the defects of the existing law were not yet fully developed, and I thought that in Bengal at any rate the ryots were sufficiently holding

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80. The enhanced rent, the Rule laid down, bore to the previous rent the same proportion that the increased gross value of the produce bore to the previous gross value.

The onus of establishing their case by full legal proof lay entirely on the zamindars. As long as the revenue officers tried such cases zamindars won very many suits despite their failure to provide all the necessary evidence, since 'the revenue officers seem to have entered upon the cases . . . with the knowledge that as a rule, prices of produce had risen very much'. With the transference of the rent cases to the civil courts, the position of the zamindars became far more difficult. The courts, unlike the revenue officers, did not assume the fact of the price rise but relied exclusively on the ordinary rules of evidence. Zamindars found it extremely difficult to prove when the rent was previously fixed and what was at that time the gross value of the produce.

81. The rent history since 1859 scarcely bears out the following view about the effects of Act X of 1859 on the movement of rent: 'What the law achieved in effect was to convert customary rent into economic competition rent. As non-occupancy ryots were denied the benefit of pargana rate they paid a competition rent fixed just short of their subsistence. But this then was made the standard to determine the pargana rate for the occupancy ryots. The new ground for enhancement with reference to rise in prices lent to enhancement a precise economic determinism'. (Palit, *op. cit.*, p. 186). As noted later, rent in Bengal was in most cases not a competitive rent. Moreover, despite the permissibility of an increase in rent on the ground of a rise in the prices, rent was scarcely determined accordingly, largely because of the zamindars' difficulty in enforcing the principle, and the addition of *abwabs*, by which zamindars, baffled in legally increasing rent, sought to increase rent, rendered it a highly arbitrary process, devoid of any precision whatsoever.

their own'.<sup>82</sup> He did not think that 'the evils are so undoubted that we can interfere thoroughly and effectually'. It was inexpedient because he did not think 'the political circumstances of the time sufficiently favourable'.<sup>83</sup> By this he meant the strong probability of opposition from the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. He was aware that Northbrook held views 'which were much more conservative than those on which I had been acting with the support of previous Viceroys'.<sup>84</sup> He found Northbrook 'very much indisposed to any interference between landlord and tenant', and he was cautious to move because 'any action on my part might bring into prominence a divergence of views'.<sup>85</sup> In fact with increasing popular discontent over what the *Friend of India* called 'over-Government or Stracheyism', over excessive legislation, enhancement of land revenue, increased local cesses and imposts and, above all, income tax, Northbrook became more and more inclined towards a policy of non-interference.<sup>86</sup> The Duke of Argyll, Secretary of State, too was not quite in sympathy with Campbell's reform measures. 'Reports' of Campbell's 'intentions' touched the 'susceptibilities of the Duke of Argyll in regard to the position of landlords', and Argyll 'cautioned me against any undue interference with the rights which had been given by the fundamental laws of the Bengal system'.<sup>87</sup>

Under the circumstances an attempt by Campbell at revising the Rent Act would undoubtedly have been inexpedient, but Campbell was not right in thinking that its revision was unnecessary. What happened during his own administration was enough to prove him wrong. The main source of error in his judgement was his belief in the intrinsic vitality of customs to withstand changes brought about by law and other circumstances. He ignored how new developments, including the changing relations between zamindars and ryots, tended to affect the content of these customs.<sup>88</sup>

82. *Memoirs of My Indian Career* (London, 1893), ii, 106.

83. *ibid.*

84. *ibid.*, p. 225.

85. *ibid.*, p. 291.

86. G. R. G. Hambly, 'Unrest in Northern India during the Viceroyalty of Lord Mayo, 1869-1872; the background to Lord Northbrook's policy of neutrality', in *Royal Central Asian Journal*, Jan. 1961.

87. *Memoirs*, ii, 290.

88. Much of the confusion in his thinking on the Irish land question, which he studied with great care, derived precisely from this source.

The class tension further intensified during the administration of Temple, and he took up the rent question in earnest. His attitude to the agrarian disputes of the time and the measure he suggested for solving them basically differed from Campbell's. Campbell looked upon the uprising of the Pabna peasants as an exceptional event and believed it would not recur. Temple believed that the hostilities had ceased largely because of the strong police measures, and not because of the disappearance to their cause. Such troubles would, consequently, happen again, and, worse still, soon affect larger areas.<sup>89</sup> Temple's version of the origins of the agrarian disputes also differed from Campbell's. Campbell was inclined to blame them on the zamindars. Temple related the disputes to the failure of the zamindars in enhancing rent by legal means, for which the existing legal and judicial machinery was largely to blame. Such a failure led them to impose illegal cesses on ryots. Ryots resisted them. Hence the disputes.<sup>90</sup> It is natural that Temple sought to solve them in a different way from Campbell.

Temple contemplated revising the rent law in two days: the substitution of prompt executive action for the tardy judicial machinery to deal with local disputes of the Pabna type as they arose, and the formulation of new principles for the determination of the rent rates. Temple believed the Collectors were more competent to decide rent suits because of their greater familiarity with the intricate questions relating to rent.<sup>91</sup> Collectors with local knowledge could act far more quickly than the civil courts, and this quick action, in times of strained class relations, Temple assumed, could do more towards pacifying the rival groups.

A distinctive feature of Temple's approach to the rent question was his assumption of the inevitability of a rise in rent. Like some contemporary political economists Temple believed<sup>92</sup>:

'It is not possible, under the circumstances in Bengal, that rents should remain unchanged. If the value of land is to increase with the rise in prices and the improvement of produce, it follows

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89. Beng. L. R. Misc., Progs., March 1875, Colln 14-2, Temple's Minute of 16 March 1875, paras 8-9.

90. This was more or less the zamindars' point of view.

91. *ibid*, paras 15-16.

92. *Report on the administration of Bengal, 1875-76*, 'General Summary', pp. 9-10.

that there must be a moderate and gradual augmentation of rent throughout the country from time to time, enough to satisfy the landlords, while leaving a clear and liberal margin of profit to the raiyat. If the material resources of the country are to grow and expand, if the culture of new staples is to flourish ... if in short agriculture is to advance, then concurrently some augmentation of rent is to be expected'.

Temple, however, had to reconcile this concept of a rising rent rate with the accepted legal notion that the so-called occupancy ryots, unlike the non-occupancy ryots, had a special claim to legal protection against enhancement of rent. In Temple's new scheme<sup>93</sup> the rent of non-occupancy ryots was 'left to mutual arrangement between landlord and tenant, and to adjust itself just as prices and market rates adjust themselves'.<sup>94</sup> Temple believed such 'competitive rates of rent' actually prevailed, and took such rates as the basis for the determination of the rent rates of occupancy ryots. Temple thus explained his scheme: in disputes over rent rates, the permissible enhancement would vary according to the difference between the rent of the non-occupancy ryot and that of the occupancy ryot. Zamindars could claim a certain portion of the difference, but such portion would vary inversely with 'the length and character of the possession' of the occupancy ryot.<sup>95</sup> The occupancy ryot would 'always' pay 20% less than the non-occupancy ryot.

This method, Temple believed, would remove the basic cause of the agrarian disputes—uncertainty about the rent due from the peasants, and would eventually result in replacing an archaic system of rent, consisting of a nominal rate and of a number of ill-defined cesses, by a rational system with all the certainty given it by definable and identifiable market forces.

Temple's scheme shows a clear pro-zamindar bias. His version of the origin of the agrarian disputes substantially agreed with the zamindars'. His principles for the determination of the rent rates of occupancy ryots were also basically similar to those which a section of zamindars represented by the British Indian Association explained to Reynolds, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, more than a

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93. Beng. L. R. Misc., Progs., Nov. 1876, Colin 14-20/30, Temple's Minute of 18 April 1876.

94. *ibid.*, para 13.

95. *ibid.*, the scale of this variation is explained in para 16.

month before Temple explained his scheme in his Minute of 18 April, 1876.<sup>96</sup> His plea for a special law to give zamindars better facilities for realising 'undisputed' arrears of rent, based on the argument that 75% of the rent suits were suits for such arrears, was evidently influenced by the similar views of the zamindars. With the recent administrative measures making zamindars responsible for the collection of the Road Cess (1871) and the Public Works Cess (1877) they insisted more and more on such a summary law. The Government of Eden admitted that the 'loud and constant complaints' of zamindars persuaded Government to their point of view. Very many Government officers, however, believed that where the peasants did not contest the rent rate, the arrears of rent were due to their sheer inability to pay and in such cases suits were rare. Suits, they thought, invariably suggested some other complications, for which zamindars were largely responsible.<sup>97</sup>

The only suggestion of Temple's that formed the basis of a new law was the one relating to the decision of rent disputes by revenue authorities, instead of by civil courts. The new law—The Agrarian Disputes Act of 1876—authorising the executive authorities to intervene in cases of serious rent disputes, was intended to be an exceptional measure. It was in fact removed from the statute book before much use was made of it. His plan relating to rent enhancement was judged entirely unrealistic by almost all local officers. The so-called competitive rate of rent turned out to be a pure myth. The Commissioner of the Presidency Division expressed a more or less representative opinion :<sup>98</sup>

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96. *ibid.*, Colln 14-26/27, the letter is dated 10 March 1876. The Association wrote : 'if the difference between the rent paid by occupancy ryot and that paid by the tenants-at-will, which they take to be the competitive rate, be adopted at the leases for settlement, a clear and definite principle would be arrived at'.

97. The Registrar of the High Court wrote to the Government of Bengal : 'The Judges desire to reiterate once more what they have repeatedly asserted before, that organised resistance to the payment of rent by ryots is invariably due to systematic efforts to enhance it . . . , that bad relations between zamindar and ryot are almost universally due either to the property changing hands and to the speculator's desire to augment the yield of his purchase, or to the zamindar allowing a middleman to come between him and the ryots' . . . (Beng Jud. Progs., May 1879, Nos. 10-11, para 13).

98. Beng. L. R. Misc Progs., Nov. 1876, Colln 14-66/67, letter to Govt. of Bengal, 31 Aug. 1876, para 15

'The notion of competitive rent has even yet obtained no footing in the rural economy of Bengal . . . near the Presidency there is perhaps some little competition for land, but even this is local rather than general . . . It is not in fact what we understand by free competition at all; that is, it is not a competition of capital and skill determined by profits . . . rent in such cases is merely the result of the relation of the numbers who want the land on the one side to the quantity of land on the other, and the numbers who want the land are not determined by the considerations of the profits it gives to capital, but by the necessity of subsistence'.

The question of the summary law for the realisation of undisputed arrears was taken up by the next administration.

After Eden took over, the emphasis shifted further towards the point of view of the zamindars. He entirely ignored the role of the zamindars in the prevailing agrarian tension, and believed that 'the primary want' in Bengal was a summary law of the kind proposed by Temple, since rents were withheld 'either for the sake of delay, or in pursuance of some organised system of opposition to the zamindar'. He was partly responsible for popularising the misleading generalisation—quite a commonplace in the official reports of the time—that it was the Bihar peasants who needed legal protection, but not the Bengal peasants, since they were 'stronger' than the zamindars. The summary law, however, was not passed. The Government of India did not agree to one of its fundamental principles—the free alienation of peasants' holdings for the realisation of arrears of rent. Apart from this, it was felt that fair as the measure would have been, it might eventually adversely affect the established rights of peasants. The Government found it 'almost impossible to frame a procedure which shall be perfectly fair to both parties, and yet afford such special facilities to the zamindar as he seeks to secure'.<sup>99</sup>

#### 9 : *The background of the Rent Bill of 1880.*

The Rent Bill drafted by the Rent Commission (1880) was a landmark in the history of rent legislation in Bengal. After 1859 it was the first official attempt at reconstructing the whole rent law

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99. *Report of the Rent Law Commission*, 1880, Vol. 2, p. 209. Govt of Bengal to the Govt. of India, April 1879.



with a strong emphasis on the need to protect the rights of peasants and of a numerous intermediate group as well. It thus reversed the trend of the administration of Temple and Eden. The new attitude remained essentially unchanged, at least till 1885. How do we explain this new trend?

The administrative experience in Bihar, during and after the famine of 1873-74, had a role in this. Government officers came to know that the famine did not result from crop failure alone. It seemed a paradox to Geddes, who was investigating in 1876 how the famine affected Darbhanga, that in spite of a fertile soil the peasants 'should not tide over vicissitudes by falling back on food reserves or on money resource'. To him the answer was the particular tenure under which the peasants held and cultivated land:<sup>100</sup>

'The whole conditions of agricultural industry are such as to render it precarious. It is impossible for the population to fall back this year solely on the accumulated reserve, whether of grain, of property, of money, or of credit. For the whole conditions of life are such as to preclude any sufficient accumulation of the kind. The ryot cannot fall back upon any credit fund . . . like the tenant right of other parts of Bengal' for practically there is no such right available to offer in pledge.

This was by no means an exceptional opinion. Very many officers thought alike. Such a conclusion was confirmed by the findings of the official investigation into the indigo question, which led the Government to conclude that its root was the landlord-tenant relationship where peasants' rights in land had been nearly extinguished. The Famine Commission reaffirmed the point. The generalisation that 'as a rule, the cultivators with occupancy rights are better off than the tenants-at-will' was not, however, confined to Bihar. The Commission believed it was true everywhere in Bengal and Bihar. 'Whenever enquiry has been made it has been found that in all matters relating to material prosperity, such as the possession of more cattle, better houses and better clothes, the superiority lies on the side of the occupancy tenants'. In view of 'extreme subdivision of land among tenants at will', 'the liability of rent to be forced up to a ruinous height', and the extreme pressure of population on land

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100. India Famine Progs., Dec. 1876, Appendix C, Geddes to the Commissioner of Patna and Bhagalpur, 24 Jan. 1876, para 112.

‘any security of tenure which defends a part of the population from that competition must necessarily be to them a source of material comfort and of peace of mind. It is only under such tenures as convey permanency of holding, protection from arbitrary enhancement of rent, and security of improvement, that we can expect to see property accumulated, credit grow up and improvements effected in the system of cultivation. There can be no greater misfortune to the country than that the numbers of occupancy class should decrease, and that such tenants should be merged in the crowd of rackrented tenants-at-will, who owning no permanent connection with the land, have no incentive to thrift or to improvement’.<sup>101</sup>

What was strikingly original in the Commission’s report was the idea that—

the condition of the rent law and the way in which it is administered in Bengal are a very grave hindrance to its agricultural prosperity, and that large portions of the agricultural population remain, mainly owing to this cause, in a state of poverty at all times dangerously near to actual starvation, and unable to resist the additional strain of famine.<sup>102</sup>

The imperfections in the rent law were not unknown, but none had so far blamed the destitution of the people on them. Equally forceful was the Commission’s argument that for the Government to abstain any longer from intervention to regulate the relations of zamindars and peasants would be a desertion of its responsibility. In a country where most people lived on agriculture it was

‘impossible for the state, as the guardian of the common interests of the community, to leave the mutual relations of the payers and receivers of rent to adjust themselves by competition and the ordinary rules which govern commercial contracts’.<sup>103</sup>

The recent famines had deeply perturbed the Government, and such an analysis of their origin emphasising a necessary relation between the institution of land tenure and rent law on the hand and the

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101. Parl. papers, 1880, LII, (C-2735), Report, pt. 2.

102. Parl. papers, 1880, LII, (C-2735), Report of the Commission, part 2, p. 117.

103. *ibid.*, para 113.

poverty of the masses of people on the other had a deep impact on the Government thinking on the whole rent question.

9A : *Influence of the Contemporary Irish agrarian situation*

It is highly probable that the contemporary Irish agrarian question also influenced such thinking. With the big agricultural slump in the late 1870s—largely as a result of the increasing importation of cheap prairie wheat into Europe<sup>104</sup>—which was aggravated by many other circumstances, such as the world monetary depression and the outbreak of liver rot in sheep (1879) the Irish situation fast deteriorated. Large scale evictions followed the failure of the peasants to pay their rent because of falling agricultural prices. The peasants fought back by violent means. 'The whole fabric of Irish society was shaken'.<sup>105</sup> The Act of 1881 quickly followed as an attempt at pacifying the country.

The Rent Law Commission, whose Rent Bill started the systematic discussion over the whole rent question, did not mention the Irish situation. But some of the provisions of the Bill suggest an influence of the Irish agrarian legislation. For instance, compensation for disturbance—an important provision of the Bill—was entirely a new concept in Bengal, since, unlike in Ireland, the eviction of peasants here was far from a common phenomenon. The phrase 'the three F's' was often used to describe the main changes contemplated by the Bill.<sup>106</sup> Dufferin was extremely fond of emphasising his role in 'reducing' the Bengal Tenancy Bill 'to a more reasonable shape than

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104. The introduction of labour-saving machinery greatly increasing the yield of prairie farmers' crop, the phenomenal expansion of railways across the prairie and a sudden abundance of cheap ocean-going transport exposed Europe to the full impact of the competition of prairie wheat. 'With the law of diminishing returns on its back, no agriculture in densely populated, highly framed Europe could possibly meet prairie prices upon level terms'. (R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, Oxford, 1963, p. 116) By 1879 every country west of Russia faced the alternatives—to put on a tariff or to lose the best of its wheat fields, and except Great Britain and Belgium every wheat-growing country chose the former.

105. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914*, p. 72.

106. Erskine Perry, Member of the India Council, wrote to Ripon on 27 May 1881: 'The acceptance by the Government here of the three F's . . . runs on all fours with the principle of the Bill passed by the Rent Law Commission' (*Private Correspondence of Ripon with persons in England*, 1881, letter No. 67).

it had acquired under the impulsive hands of Thomson and his Irish advisers'.<sup>107</sup>

Whatever the actual influence of the Irish situation on the provisions of the Rent Bills at various stages, it probably affected the Government attitude to the agrarian question in Bengal, though there is no evidence that Government feared a peasants' revolt of the Irish type in Bengal. The Government felt uneasy over the situation in Bengal and the fact that Government could not foresee what would happen heightened this uneasiness. Cunningham, a member of the Famine Commission, felt: 'the grave political and social dangers, to which an impoverished, and rackrented peasantry gives rise are everywhere assuming a more menacing aspect'.<sup>108</sup> Rivers Thomson's view of the unambitious rent legislation of 1859 as an attempt to avert an imminent 'agrarian revolution' is evidence of his deep anxiety over the agrarian situation he had to tackle. The fervour in Ilbert's defence of the Tenancy Bill in the Viceroy's Council derives from a sense of emergency:

'we are responsible for the introduction into this country of forces which threaten to revolutionise and disintegrate its social and economic system; we can not fold our hands and let them work in accordance with nature's blind laws ...'.<sup>109</sup>

It is probable that the critical turn in the Irish situation had a role in creating such a pervasive sense of emergency. The frequent comparison by Ripon, in his private correspondence, of the agrarian situation in Bengal with that in Ireland is also suggestive. Ripon, as his correspondence shows, took a keen interest in the Irish situation. In 1880 he received 'from persons in England' 24 letters, and 58 in 1881, that dealt with the Irish question. His sympathies lay wholly with the Irish. 'I can say at once that my sympathies with Ireland are deep and earnest, and I doubt if you would find

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107. Dufferin wrote to Halifax on 6 May 1885: 'I knocked out of it [the Tenancy Bill] a good many of the extravagances which had been introduced into it by the Celtic advisers of the Lieutenant Governor'. (*Dufferin correspondence with persons in England*, Nov. 1884—Dec. 1885, Dufferin Papers, Microfilm, Reel No. 525, letter No. 24). The 'Celtic advisers' were A. P. MacDonnell and O'Kinealy. See S. Gopal, *British Policy in India, 1858-1905* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 155.

108. H. S. Cunningham, *British India and its rulers*, (London, 1882).

109. *Selection of papers relating to the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885*, Calcutta, 1920), pp. 501-502.

anyone among English public men who would be willing to go farther than I should in the direction of the meeting the wishes of the Irish people.<sup>110</sup> He was distressed to see the spread of violence, since this he believed would scarcely solve the Irish problem. The reports of 'the discovery of extensive conspiracies' made him feel 'sad and ... almost hopeless. It seems as if the whole weight of the sins of our forefathers was coming upon us, who are honestly desirous to do right'.<sup>111</sup> Under the circumstances he was convinced that 'it would be a fatal error to attempt to apply inadequate remedies which would only irritate and not cure ... it seems to me that nothing short of the three F's has a chance of success'.<sup>112</sup>

His experience of the Irish situation undoubtedly influenced his judgement on the agrarian situation in India in general and on that in Bengal in particular. He judged that the Indian situation was largely similar to the one in Ireland. 'The truth is that a system of cottier tenancies at the competition rents, in a country where the great mass of the people live upon the land, is a thoroughly bad system, and if not remedied by the parties themselves, must sooner or later be remedied by the State. We have a very similar condition of things to deal with in many parts of India'.<sup>113</sup> After describing, in a letter to John Ball, Gladstone's Irish Land Bill as a 'bold and honest attempt', Ripon wrote emphatically of the need to introduce a similar measure in Bengal: 'We out here shall have to take up almost immediately very similar questions concerning land tenure in Bengal. I have, therefore, a double interest in the fate of the Irish Bill'.<sup>114</sup> The absence of an organised peasant movement in India, similar to the one in Ireland led by Parnell, only heightened the sense of moral responsibility that the 'cause' of the Indian peasants should be taken up by the State. 'We have, in many parts of India, very much the same state of things as you have in Ireland, with the exception that no Parnell has yet arisen among Indian ryots. I must, therefore, convert myself to some extent into a Land League, and

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110. *Private correspondence of Ripon with persons in England*, 1884; Letter No. 27; Ripon to Orby Shipley, April 7, 1884.

111. *ibid*, 1882; Letter No. 12, Ripon to Viscount Halifax, 28 January, 1882.

112. *ibid*, 1881; Letter No. 22, Ripon to Earl of Northbrook, 20 March, 1881.

113. *ibid*, 1882; Letter No. 44, Ripon to Viscount Halifax, April 3, 1882.

114. *ibid*, 1881; Letter No. 77.

take up the cause of the silent cultivators who neither shoot their landlords nor obstruct public business'.<sup>115</sup>

10 : *Initiative of the Government of India in the making of the Tenancy Legislation of 1858.*

The original conception of the rent legislation emphasising the need for more effectively protecting the interests of the peasants was the Government of Bengal's, but the Government of India fully agreed with this emphasis and consistently supported the former. When the Bengal Tenancy Bill was introduced in the Viceroy's Council in 1883, the Government of India became more directly involved in the question, and the zeal with which Ripon's Government defended the Bill was remarkable. Ripon had strong convictions about tenant rights. He called the land question in India 'one great subject, the greatest of all subjects connected with this country'.<sup>116</sup> He candidly admitted the role of the past administrative failures in the present 'insecure position' of the peasants, and thought it 'a very clear matter of duty' to try 'to remedy the consequences of our error'. He conceived his role in this as part of his pursuit of 'those broad liberal principle which I have professed all my life and from which I have no intention of deviating now that I am growing old',<sup>117</sup> and he was ready for a fight for his convictions: 'we shall have to encounter a powerful opposition from the landowners . . . but I am strong in the goodness of my cause, and shall fight my battle . . . with a good heart'.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, he was in constant touch with the Secretary of State, explaining to him the nature and actual scope of the Tenancy Bill in order to remove all doubts about its fairness. This was particularly necessary because of the opposition of some members of the India Council to the Bill on the one hand, and of the persistent efforts of some Bengal zamindars, on the other, to prejudice the Secretary of State against it.<sup>119</sup> It is doubtful if Ripon would have

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115. *ibid.*, 1881; Letter No. 81, Ripon to Viscount Monck, 8 July, 1881.

116. *ibid.*, Letter No. 112, Ripon to Gladstone, 22 Oct 1881.

117. *Private Correspondence of Ripon with the Secretary of State*, 1883, Letter No. 5a, letter to the Under Secretary of State for India, 16 Jan. 1883.

118. *Private Correspondence of Ripon with persons in England*, 1883, letter No. 5, Ripon to W. E. Forster, 9 Jan. 1883.

119. Kimberley, Secretary of State, wrote to Ripon (23 Nov. 1883): 'I begin to receive a good many letters from different quarters remonstrating in the zamindar interest against the Bengal Tenancy Bill. I shall be anxious to hear what are the prospects of its passing'. (*Private Correspondence with the Secretary of State*, 1883, letter No. 73).

agreed to the later changes in favour of zamindars in the final Bill during Dufferin's viceroyalty. In a letter to Dufferin he frankly disapproved of them: 'You have made more concessions to the zamindars than I shall have done'.<sup>120</sup>

11 : *Retreat of the Government from its original stand  
on the Tenancy Legislation.*

The Bill as it was finally passed was less favourable to the peasants than its earlier drafts, and Dufferin frankly admitted that such changes were made 'at the instance of the zamindar party'.<sup>121</sup> Before Ilbert introduced the Bengal Tenancy Bill in 1883 in the Viceroy's Council, the Government of India argued with the Secretary of State in favour of broadening the basis of the right of occupancy by abolishing the 12-year rule and taking instead 'the land as the basis of the occupancy right', so that all ryots would acquire occupancy rights merely by 'holding or cultivating raiyati land'.<sup>122</sup> The Secretary of State rejected the suggestion. The Bill of 1883 thus retained the 12-year rule, but provided that a ryot would acquire occupancy status by holding land in the same 'village or estate'. The qualification 'or estate' was ultimately dropped. Its acceptance would have been a distinct advantage for the ryots, since in very many cases an 'estate' comprised more than one village. The earlier Bills gave the peasants a right to the free sale of their holdings without the consent of their zamindars, but the final Bill withdrew it. Amir Ali, who was representing the ryot's point of view in the Select Committee considering the Bill, called the right to free sale 'the keystone of the measure', and argued that as a result of allowing zamindars to intervene in such sales 'a large portion of the consideration money will pass either into the hands of the landlords or their servants'.<sup>123</sup> The so-called *pargana* rate—on the basis of which Act X of 1859, as we have seen, allowed zamindars to enhance rent—had no place in the 1883 Bill, and the Government of Bengal consistently argued against recognising it. The rate was in fact non-existent, and it was argued the fiction occasioned much fraud and oppression on the part of zamindars. The Final Bill, however, retained the provision. The

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120. *Dufferin Paper*, Microfilm, Reel No. 525, letter No. 26, dated 17 April 1885.

121. *Selection of papers relating to the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885*, p. 616.

122. *ibid.*, p. 19, Despatch to Secretary of State, 21 March 1882, para 62.

123. *ibid.*, Minute of Dissent by Amir Ali, 12 Feb. pp. 424-25.

Bill of 1883 prescribed a maximum limit of rent for the non-occupancy ryot and gave those ejected for non-payment of rent a right to claim 'compensation for improvement' and 'compensation for disturbance'. The Final Bill replaced these provisions and left the non-occupancy ryot entirely unprotected as regards his rent.

Yet from the point of view of the peasants, the Act of 1885 was a distinct improvement on the Act of 1859. The acquisition of occupancy rights was an easier process now. A peasant could qualify by cultivating for a period of 12 years any plot of land in a given village, instead of a particularly plot of land. Unlike the Act of 1859 the new Act did not allow a ryot to contract himself out of such a right. The Act deprived zamindars of their old power of ejecting peasants for arrears of rent alone, but the sale of an occupancy ryot's holding in execution of a decree for rent was permissible. As for the quantum of rent, the Act did not reduce it anywhere. There was no change either in the three main grounds of rent enhancement of the old Act. A significant change in procedure was the provision that the Government would be responsible for preparing the price-lists necessary for deciding suits for rent enhancement on the ground of the increased value of the produce. Moreover, rent could be enhanced only once in a period of 15 years, and the quantum of enhancement could not exceed 12.5% of the existing rent. The Act did not legalise the free sale of peasants' holdings, but where such sales were customary the civil courts would not prohibit them. A significant provision of the Act was the authority it gave the Government to make a Record of Rights, on the basis of survey, even in the zamindari estates. Such surveys were previously thought inconsistent with the rights of the zamindars. All these provisions applied only to occupancy ryots. Non-occupancy ryots and undertenants of occupancy ryots were left unprotected.

The fundamental assumption of the Government in seeking to legally protect peasants was a faith in the capacity of small peasants to evolve the most efficient organisation of production, given a security of tenure and reasonably moderate rent. The Act undoubtedly provided more elaborately for these two needs than before. But it had several obvious shortcomings. The recognition of the so-called *pargana* rate as a basis for rent enhancement perpetuated a source of well-known abuses. Zamindars found the enhancement of rent on the ground of the increased value of the produce an easier process now since the price lists supplied by the Government itself provided unquestionable evidence of a price rise, whereas before it was extreme-



ly difficult for them to satisfy the civil courts on this score. The greatest shortcoming of the Act was that it protected only one category of ryots—the occupancy ryots—and entirely ignored the non-occupancy ryots and the undertenants of occupancy ryots. With the broadening of the basis of the right of occupancy a larger number of ryots became occupancy ryots, and the number of non-occupancy ryots was probably small, except where the particular nature of cultivation made the migration of peasants from one village to another a normal thing, or where villages with well-defined boundaries did not exist. But the undertenants of occupancy ryots (*korfars*) were not a small group. Their number probably tended to increase with the better legal protection of substantial peasants naturally strengthening their universal tendency to sublet their lands. The Act thus failed to protect a considerable group of producing peasants. As a result their tenure became insecure and their rent rose. To that extent the purpose of the Act was defeated.

Even if such shortcomings were removed, the Act would have only partially fulfilled the expectations of the Government, because the main assumption of the Government was only partially valid. The Government over-emphasised the role of rent enhancement in the impoverishment of peasants, and ignored the whole production process, the whole complex of rural credit, the control of the credit agencies over peasants' land and produce, and how all these factors reacted on the production process.

## 12 : *Conclusions.*

Evidently, while the role of the Government in the sphere of agricultural production was negligible, they had a more active role to play in some spheres of relations of production. It would be relevant here to examine a recent trend of opinion that land legislation was intended by the Government as an instrument of social change. 'Land policy, through its influence on the distribution of power within Indian society', argues T. R. Metcalf, 'was perhaps the one really effective organ of social change open to the British in the 19th century'.<sup>124</sup> Ravinder Kumar goes to the extent of saying that conscious attempts on the part of the British at social change

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124. Thomas R. Metcalf, 'The influence of the Mutiny on land policy in India,' in *The Historical Journal*, 1961, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 152.

constituted 'a new departure in the principles of administration in India'. He thus argues the point :<sup>125</sup>

'A distinguishing feature of British rule in India was the promotion of social change by the State, as distinct from spontaneous transformations in society, through a rational agrarian policy, through the creation of new institutions of administration, and through the dissemination of new principles of economic organization. The promotion of social change through deliberate acts of policy was a new departure in the guiding principles of administration in India. For native governments possessed a limited view of their responsibilities towards the community, while the inadequate instruments of social control at their disposal, and their restricted grasp of the principles of economic organization, prevented them from embarking upon rational programmes of progress'.

Dr. Kumar does add that this broad social policy was also motivated by considerations of imperial interests. The British 'also recognised the connection between the stability of a regime, particularly one based on conquest, and its ability to satisfy the aspirations of dominant or emerging social groups in community. British administrators consequently tried to promote social progress through fostering social groups whose interests were tied to the new regime, and who therefore possessed a vast stake in its survival.'

A recent view<sup>126</sup> on the origins and nature of the agrarian legislation of 1859 in Bengal (Act X of 1859) also argues from an identical premise. The Act has been called 'the most inspired piece of social engineering by legislation'. The policy embodied in the Act, which amounted to a rejection of the old tradition of *laissez faire*, was designed, it is argued, to arrest the process of 'polarisation of agricultural profits in favour of the rent-receivers', which resulted from the old policy of *laissez faire*, since it 'had hindered capital formation at the grass-root level by giving landlords a free hand to mop up everything above the subsistence of the primary producers'. The

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125. Ravinder Kumar, 'The rise of the rich peasants in Western India', in D.A. Low (ed) *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, (London, 1968), p. 25.

126. C. Palit, op. cit., p. 4. Similar views have been expressed also by several other authors. For instance, Dr. Dharma Kumar observes: 'The chief administrative and legal levers for bringing about social changes lay not in the reform of slavery but in land policy'. (*Land and Caste in South India*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 77).

Government, intervening now in favour of the ryot, 'sought to rally him to the cause of agricultural development by an attempt at a fair distribution of agricultural profits between landlords and peasants' Dr. Palit adds, as noted earlier, that such a shift in the 'official policy resulted not merely from the motive of encouraging 'capital formation at the grass root level', 'at the level of primary producers', for its own sake. The dominant motive was to create conditions in which peasants could produce for the world market. The peasants were chosen as the instrument for the contemplated 'agrarian revolution', since much to the disappointment of the Government 'the [indigo] planters petered out as an entrepreneurial agency in the moffusil'.

Such a view could be tested with special reference to what the Government did in Bengal. That land policies of the Government, including the measures adopted from time to time toward regulating the relations between different economic groups or classes, inevitably affected such groups is unquestionable. However, the pertinent question is whether the Government consciously aimed at significant social changes, and whether the Government consistently followed such aims, where they had some.

Evidently, the concept 'social change' is applicable in this case in a very restricted sense. Adoption of certain measures aimed at protecting peasants from an increase of rent, or promotion certain social groups whose interests were closely tied to the Government could only marginally affect the complicated process of social change. Even in a restricted sense the concept of 'social change' in connection with the motives behind the rent legislation in Bengal is hardly a valid one.

What the Government sought to do in 1859 and also later was to restore and retrieve what they feared had been largely lost, or to preserve what was being lost. They were ever conscious that they had not been attempting innovations, since their basic assumption was that the rights of peasants which they now sought to restore or protect were the real historical ones, existing at the time of the Permanent Settlement. Their opposition to Peacock's interpretation of the permissible limits of an increase in rent also stemmed from a conviction of its inconsistency with the established rural usages. It is, however, undeniable that they were now more earnest about the need to restore some of the lost rights of peasants. Similarly, the assumption that a stable and prosperous peasantry constituted the

foundation of a stable agriculture was hardly a new one. What was new was the reassertion of an old faith under altered circumstances. The view that the Government sought to create through rent legislation the right conditions in which the Bengal peasants could produce for the world market, and also could acquire sufficient purchasing power for receiving western manufactures is, as noted earlier, unfounded. The concern of the Government over the stability and even the prosperity of agriculture was not evidently predicated upon the establishment of firm links of peasants with the international market. In fact the entire concept of 'a silent agrarian revolution' resulting from the imposition of certain constraints on the increase of rent alone is largely irrelevant.

It is also notable that the Government were aware of the difficulties in their attempts at conserving and protecting the old order, and had eventually to accept changes which inevitably tended to frustrate their original aims. Such changes were accepted not because the Government judged them desirable, but because their rejection would tend to disrupt the established order of the time. While accepting the changes and deciding to intervene to protect the old order from further changes the Government, however, hoped that they could thereby direct them along the right channel, so that the disruptive forces could be effectively contained. Ilbert thus argued the point in the Viceroy's Council (2 March, 1885).<sup>127</sup> According to him the 'most striking features' of the 'social and economic condition of Bengal at the present day' were 'transformation, transition, growth and change'. Here he found 'the past and the present, old things and new, brought into sudden and violent contact with each other'. 'The Bengali raiyat presents many curious and instructive points of resemblance to the English customary tenant of some six or seven centuries ago'. However,

'to say that the Bengali raiyat is still living in an age which to us Englishmen has become an age of the past is to present only one side of the picture . . . Side by side with the landlord who exercises and is content to exercise his old customary seigniorial rights . . . we have the auction purchase who has bought his right as a commercial speculation, and thinks only how he can turn them to the best advantage. Side by side with the hereditary tenant, cultivating and

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127. *Papers relating to the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885*, 'Extracts Proceedings of the Viceroy's Council', 2 March 1885. Ilbert's Speech, pp. 501-502.

living on his land in the old traditional fashion, we have the enterprising planter, who has got his lease and wishes to work it so as to extract from the land the greatest possible profit in the shortest possible time. The modern theory of competition rent is jostling the old practice of customary rates : the new fashion of terminable leases is threatening to displace ancient occupancy rights. The 13th century is being brought face to face with the 19th century, and is striving with more or less success to understand or accommodate itself to its ways. The cultivator for subsistence is given way before, or, developing into, the cultivator for profit ; those who have hitherto walked in the dim twilight of custom are merging into the hard and fierce glare of law as administered by the courts. The ideas, habits, and customs of widely different ages and widely different civilization are being thrown into a common crucible, and are assuming new and strange forms. We cannot arrest this process of change ; we cannot predict with certainty the rate at which it will progress or the direction which it will take if left to itself. All that we can do is to endeavour by such means as are at our disposal to guide it in the right direction ; to ease off the abruptness of the transition from the old to the new . . . to prevent custom from being ousted too violently by competition ; to see that rules of law based on commercial transactions between hard and keen men of business are not applied to the ignorant and unlettered peasant before he is able to understand them or to use them'.

The changes that came to stay tended fast to corrode the old order which the Government were keen on preserving. While they intended to impose constraints on the increase of rent, they scarcely thought of taking measures toward fixing rent once for all. Despite their knowledge that several developments tended to increase rent, and 'many of them to weaken the security and reduce the status of the raiyat', the Government decided : 'All these advantages will remain to the zamindar ; broadly speaking we do not touch them'.<sup>128</sup> Their intention of making a settlement 'which, while it will not deprive the landlords of any of these accumulated advantages will restore to the raiyats something of the position which they occupied at the time of the Permanent Settlement' rings utterly hollow. The systematic rigour with which the Government in their own estates increased rent to permissible limits illustrates their real attitude to the rent question. Ignoring altogether the non-occupancy peasants, the cultivators who

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128. *ibid*, Proceedings of 13 March, 1883, p. 146.

held land from the occupancy ryots, and the agricultural labourers who constituted a sizeable rural group was inconsistent with their intention of protecting the old peasant community. Nothing was done toward containing the influence of moneylenders, either by legal measures or by providing alternative sources of credit, despite the common knowledge of their role in the ruin of small peasants. In fact the Government feared that any interference with the moneylenders' activities could result in the freezing of the available rural credit, and in greatly disturbing the normal mechanism of rural grain trade. The Government formally permitted in some cases transfers of peasant holdings (which inevitably included very many transfers by sale to moneylenders) arguing that 'The recognition of the right of transfer would create a direct interest in the improvement of the soil, would stimulate cultivation, would tend to establish a substantial peasant proprietary, would give a valid security for the realisation of the landlord's rent, and by increasing the marketable value of the land would lower the rate of interest when the raiyat has to borrow'.<sup>129</sup> However, in the context of chronic rural indebtedness, and of the increasing market value of land, formalisation of such transfers immensely strengthened the moneylenders.

The pieces of rent legislation in Bengal were thus scarcely conscious instruments of social change. In fact such changes as occurred in spite of the Government largely determined the pattern of such legislation. The role of the Government was thus not to create or initiate changes, but to accept or formalise them.

Even assuming, as did Ravinder Kumar, that the British Government, unlike the previous governments, had more 'sophisticated insights into social and economic problems', there is hardly any evidence that these insights led anywhere to 'the dissemination of new principles of economic organization'. Curiously, though the utilitarian idea, which influenced official thinking to a certain extent in western India in the late 1820s and the early 1830s, was to 'free the peasant from all traditional restraints in order to make him the instrument of a vast agrarian revolution', the net result of the application of the idea was the imposition of a considerably heavier revenue burden on that 'free' agent of 'agrarian revolution', which inevitably weakened the old economic organization, without leading to the

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, Offg. Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Rev. Dept. to the Secretary, Govt. of India, Legislative Dept., 1883, p. 226.

emergence of a more viable one. McCulloch's observations seem to apply best to the fate of utilitarian experiments in India: 'It seems, as if there were some strange fatality attending the Government of India; and that the greatest talents and the best intentions should, when applied to legislate for that country, produce only the most pernicious objects'.<sup>130</sup> The tax system which the utilitarians sought to introduce as one of the panaceas for India's economic ills only aggravated them in the end. Malthus argued that the pre-British tax system, under which a proportion of the gross produce of the land, as distinguished from the net product, was handed over to the State produced major distortions in the economy. As a consequence, all but the most fertile lands tended to be withdrawn from cultivation, and the exaction of a fixed portion of the gross produce, by encroaching on the legitimate shares of wages and profits, and thus distorting the natural pattern of income distribution tended to frustrate the normal expansion in the economy, since the impoverished population 'could not be a flourishing source of demand for the outputs of other sectors'. While the doctrinaires believed that the new system of taxation directed to the rental share of income 'would perfect the market by being neutral in its effects on costs', the consequence had been that 'Its claim on the purchasing power of a poverty-ridden populace had stifled the normal development of markets', since they, as McCulloch argued, overlooked a central truth that the population was poor and already overtaxed.<sup>131</sup> That the doctrinaires only imperfectly understood the Indian rural society is evident from their attitude to the question of rural credit. In Maharashtra, for instance, contrary to what the later events revealed about the activities of a *vani* (moneylender), administrators like Pringle, a devout utilitarian, believed that his rates of interest were in keeping with his risks, and did not exceed the normal profits of capital. 'Indeed, when Pringle looked at the condition of rural society in Maharashtra, he characterised the *vanis* as a class which formed the only connecting link between civilization and barbarism'.<sup>132</sup>

In Bengal there was scarcely any new theory to experiment with, and the usual intellectual influences on the Government of the time

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130 Quoted in W. J. Barber, *op cit.*, p. 184

131. *ibid.*, pp. 152-54, 184-85. Also E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), Ch. 2.

132. R. Kumar, *Western India in the 19th century* (London, 1968), pp. 135-36.

only strengthened the empirical notion that the best means of stabilizing the agriculture of Bengal was to stabilize and strengthen the peasant community. In England at the time some of the orthodox classical economists were revising some of their traditional doctrines under the impact of the Irish agrarian question. However, this revision could not go very far.<sup>133</sup> Contrary to the doctrines of the classical political economy J. S. Mill argued in his *England and Ireland* (1868) that rents should not be left to the market forces, but be controlled by law. J. E. Cairnes in a series of articles entitled 'Ireland in transition' (1865) refuted the idea that the only possible evolution of Irish agriculture was towards large farms, on the English and Scottish model, and argued that it would be quite consistent with free trade principles for the State to enact a tenant compensation law to protect and encourage the small occupiers. Cairnes, however, also propounded the view that on economic grounds the right of property in land must be considered as qualified and subordinate to the 'right of the labourer to whatever his labour has produced'. This was exceptional.

The only influence of such a revision in the orthodoxy was to strengthen the argument of the Bengal Government that increase in the rent rate should be controlled by law, and the Government seldom questioned the basis of the existing rent structure. Indeed, given the general assumptions about the basis of the security of revenue, such questions were largely irrelevant.

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133. For detail, see R. D. C. Black, op. cit., pp. 34, 53-54.



## SOME ASPECTS OF FRENCH PRESENCE IN BENGAL :

1731-1740\*

INDRANI RAY

### INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present briefly some aspects of French involvement in trade and politics of Bengal in the 1730s. It is primarily based on a study of unpublished private letters of Dupleix, the Governor of Chandernagore, to his colleagues and superiors at Cassimbazar, Pondichery, Delhi and France.<sup>1</sup> They are supplemented by official records of the French East India Company.<sup>2</sup>

Cassimbazar has secured special attention from European traders in early eighteenth century Bengal. The principal supplier of raw silk and silk articles to a host of Indian and European buyers, Cassimbazar was at the same time the main link between the court at Murshidabad and such settlements as Calcutta, Chandernagore or Chinsura. The European 'factories' (trading posts) at Cassimbazar

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### ABBREVIATIONS

B.N.Fr : Bibliotheque Nationale Fonds Francais—

N.A. : Bibliotheque Nationale, Nouvelles Acquisitions Francaises—

Ar. : Bibliotheque Arsenal—

C.P. : Correspondance du conseil Superi-e de Pondichery, avec le Conseil de Chandernagore 1728-1757.

1. Copies of these letters are preserved at the Bibliotheque Nationale and the Bibliotheque d'Arsenal in Paris.

2. Preserved at the Archives Nationales Paris. I have also consulted letters written by the Conseil Superieur of Pondichery to Chandernagore.

had perhaps more to do with politics than with trade. It was through the Chiefs of these factories that the agents of the European Companies negotiated with the Darbar for upholding a privilege, for bargaining over a special concession or for seeking redress to their endless 'grievances'. On a Chief's knowledge of the power-structure at Murshidabad, on his understanding of the system and his handling of the situation depended the conclusion of a successful deal. The Cassimbazar records of each Company are thus likely to throw considerable light on European understanding of contemporary society and politics in Bengal, as reflected in the reaction of a foreign trading community towards the local group.

The letters of Dupleix to Cassimbazar, or dealing with information received from there show involvement with local conditions, as well as his attempts to come to terms with the broader reality of the Mughal empire. They trace, over a period of a little less than a decade, the tensions building up in the existing economic and political system in Bengal, mark the constraints upon European trade, point out the loopholes through which to escape them, and usually react sharply to people and events. Their tone is always a welcome departure from those of the French authorities at home, ranging from incomprehension to indifference.

Dupleix's views and attitudes can be best understood by examining his main preoccupations while dealing with the multiple facets of French presence in Bengal. Of these, the most relevant for our present purpose are :

- A. Problems and constraints faced by the French in their trading activities, which came directly from Cassimbazar and Murshidabad.
- B. Means which Dupleix had to adopt or wanted his authorities to adopt in trying to solve these problems.

## I

The French factory at Cassimbazar had been lying idle for more than a decade or so before Dupleix arrived at Chandernagore in

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3. N.A. 9355 ff 218—230 contain a collection of French translations of Farmans and parwanas granted to the French in Bengal from 1693-1720. For English translations of the same see Seth Harihar—Some old unpublished documents of the French India Company from the Pondichery Archives. *Bengal Past and Present* January—June 1935 pp. 55-65.

August 1731. But as explained already, its importance never depended solely on trade. Within two months of his arrival he sent two French envoys to Cassimbazar to settle a series of long-standing disputes with the local government. French trading rights in Bengal were based upon two Farman from Aurangzeb and Farrukhsiyar, ratified by parawanas of ruling nawabs.<sup>3</sup> According to the agreement between the representatives of Murshid Kuli Khan and the French, enforcement of the second Farman was consequent upon a payment of 40,000 rupees to the Emperor. This payment was actually never made, although the French had secured the Farman directly through Martin, their intermediary at Delhi.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the 1720s, Murshid Kuli Khan, and his successor Shuja-ud-din held this non-payment against them. As a result the French were never given proper hearing to their complaints, mainly against unjustified exactions of *toll* dues, by local chiefs along the river routes.<sup>5</sup> Shuja-ud-din, moreover, was sore with the French from the very beginning of his reign, as they had failed to come to pay him the customary visit, with presents at his accession.<sup>6</sup> Pondichery had been receiving disturbing reports of the Nawab's men insulting the French agents at the Cassimbazar factory, of their coming to blows with the French over the possession of Gondalpara, a village adjacent to Chandernagore. Pondichery advised 'not to hurry about the presents' and regretted the choice of personnel sent to present the complaints, and the modest number of soldiers accompanying the former.<sup>7</sup> None of these were really very helpful.

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4. Hardancourt to Directors 30.12.1715. C<sup>2</sup> 69 ff 169-169V; de la Blanchetiere to the Company 25.8.1723. C<sup>2</sup> 69 ff 398-400; Martineau Alfred: *Dupleix et l'Inde Francaise* vol. I Paris 1929 pp. 105-106; p 172. Martineau is mistaken in thinking that the second Farman was obtained in 1718; according to Hardancourt, who was then the director of Chandernagore the year was 1715

5. Blanchetiere op cit C<sup>2</sup> 72 f 400. According to him, the nawab's demand was actually for the renewal of the Farman, 'the violent death of Farruksiyar having rendered the previous one useless.' Ultimately however, all such demands boiled down to the payment of the amount referred to.

6. Dupleix to the Directors 30.11.1731. B.N. Fr 8979 ff 8-8V;

7. See the following letters of the Pondichery Council to the Council at Chandernagore: 10.7.1729 C.P. Col I p. 31.

13.10.1729 Ibid 45-46

28.2.1730 Ibid 56-57

As a result Dupleix, at his arrival, found French trade in Bengal almost at a standstill.<sup>8</sup> He took care in choosing his envoys and sending a suitably impressive detachment to accompany them. The Nawab was pacified by considerable monetary offerings to him and to his officers. His general Bakar Ali Khan as the intermediary between the Nawab and the French receives special attention in this context. Dupleix claims to have convinced the 'Darbar' that the French had never really received the Farman of Farrukhsiyar, hence the question of the payment of the 40,000 rupees would arise only when the nawab procured them a copy of that Farman. For the time being Dupleix failed to secure (or to revive, according to him) a concession for the French, which was even more important to him—that of carrying their bullion to the royal mint to be converted in rupees instead of being forced to sell it to Fatehchand Jagatseth.<sup>9</sup> But he did not give up hope. Burat and St. Paul, the two envoys, were granted an audience, and presented with 'Shiropahs' on behalf of the Company as well as a horse for Dupleix himself.<sup>10</sup> While bragging of these gains, secured cheap for a total expenditure of 22,000 rupees, and noting that specially the latter caused a good deal of heartburning to Sichterman, the Chief at Chinsura, Dupleix could not but comment on the double-edged nature of such royal gifts.<sup>11</sup>

One interesting point to note in the entire transaction is the declining importance of the Farman in determining terms of trade for the French in Bengal. We should keep in minds of course, that even in the heydays of Imperial power, such a Farman was usually less of a definitive settlement than a flexible agreement.<sup>12</sup> Neverthe-

8. Supra 4, 6.

9. Dupleix to Director 14.1.1732 B.N.F. 8979 f 22V

10. B.N.Fr 8979 ff 8-9.

11. Ibid; also Dupleix to Burat 19.11.1731. B.N.Fr 8979 f 7; 16.3.1732. CP. Vol I P. 155.

The trouble and expenses involved in securing such shiropahs often outweighed their worth if any. In the letter referred to in Note 4, Blanchetière criticizes Martin for having obtained a shiropah for similar reasons. See also Dupleix to Burat 16.4.1737 B.N.Fr. 8980 f 1; infra. Note 53.

12. Sarkar J.N. History of Aurangzeb vol. v. Second edition Orient Longman's First Impression 1974, Calcutta pp. 238-273; See also Marshall P.J. British Expansion in India in the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Revision. Mimeographed paper presented at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta, March 1975.

lss, problems arising from the absence of a Farman find many references in letters written from Chandernagore in the period 1690s—1720, and its possession declared as the one solid guarantee of trade security.<sup>13</sup> By the 1730s, however, the local authorities no more consider it necessary to refer to the Farman at every step, as guide to their relationship with the foreign trader. It is this reduced importance of the Imperial order in the provincial context and not any manoeuvre displayed by the French that explains the acceptance of their version of the affair by a government which would hardly let slip away such an opportunity for bargaining. Dupleix senses this quite early and remarks that the Nawab will never be in a hurry to press the point, as he will not get a single rupee out of the amount demanded on behalf of the Emperor.<sup>14</sup> From time to time the issue was revived by the local court. But Dupleix could see that this pressure was not put necessarily by the Nawab to show his allegiance to Delhi. It was rather a device of Haji Ahmed and Alamchand to get some money out of the French. In actual practice all the European companies were trading by the parawana of the ruling Nawab.<sup>15</sup> What he was not yet prepared to accept fully was that Murshidabad's attitude to the entire issue of the Farman was a reflection of the increasingly slackening hold of the central authority over Bengal.

Dupleix formed his opinion about the 'blacks' in general and the 'Maure' (Muslim) government in particular, at quite an early date after his arrival in Bengal. From the very beginning he notes that all the European powers were in turn subjected to maltreatment by the government. While the French could not do any trade, a considerable amount of bullion belonging to the Dutch was seized from the mint. According to Dupleix this was to punish the Dutch for having refused to comply to an unjustified claim for money.<sup>16</sup> The English were also being harrassed because of the enormous amount

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13. On the importance of the Farman stressed by the French in Bengal see :— *Memoires de Francois Martin, fondateur de Pondichery (1665-1694)*, vol III published by A. Martiniau Paris 1934 (Henceforward Martin) p. 60; Deslandes to the Company 15.12.1691 C<sup>63</sup> f 208; Deslandes to the Company 4.1.1700 C<sup>65</sup> f 111; Hardancourt's letter op. cit, C<sup>6</sup> 69 f. 169.

14. Dupleix to Directors 30.11.1731 B.N.F 8V.

15. Letter of Dupleix to Burat 21.6.1737. B.N.Fr. 8980 f 9. 23.6.1737. Ibid f. 10.

16. Dupleix to Directors 14.1.1732. B.N.Fr. 8979 f. 21-V.

of private trade carried on by them under cover of their Company's flag. Dupleix himself puts down the total annual amount of English trade at 100 lakhs of Rupees, only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of which, according to him, could be ascribed to the Company's trade proper.<sup>17</sup> His reaction to this situation was mixed. Continuation of the prohibition of English trade would mean capturing a sizable freight for French private ships sailing to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. At the same time, the English and the French had some common suppliers among the Indian merchants residing in Calcutta. The latter were afraid to work for all Europeans in general. This would lead to a delay in sending off the ships on time.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Dupleix was concerned over the 'lamentable' habit of the English and the Dutch to 'bend too quickly' to the unjust demands of the government. The English might even submit to the pressure for accepting a Muslim governor for Calcutta, to look after the affairs of the natives. All this would amount to all the 'nations' being subjected to the worst form of slavery.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the decade Dupleix retained his disgust and mistrust of the local government. His choicest invectives were reserved for the Nawab, 'an old drunkard, given to the worst vices' . . . 'surrounded by a band of rogues who make him commit all sorts of stupidities'.<sup>20</sup> The Nawab's entourage rather than the Nawab himself plays nevertheless a much larger role in dealings between the Europeans and the Darbar. The importance of the triumvirate of Haji Ahmed, Alamchand and Fatechand in the power structure at Murshidabad is quite well-known a phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> So only some specific details about the role of each is presented here.

17. Dupleix to Lenoir 25.10.1731. B.N.Fr. 8979 f 3V.

18. Ibid; see also Dupleix to Directors 30.11.1731. B.N.Fr. 8979 f 8.

19. Supra Note 17.

20. Dupleix to Forestieri 2.9.1732. B.N.Fr. 8979 f 50V. Dupleix to Directors 30.11.1732 B.N.Fr. 8979 f 73V.

21. Gholam Hossein Khan : *Seir Mutaquherin*, Trans. Published by T. D. Chatterji Calcutta 1902 Vol I p. 281; see also *History of Bengal* Vol II ed. Sarkar J. N. Dacca 1948 (2nd Imp. 1972) p. 423.

Bhattacharya Sukumar : *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal* 2nd ed. 1969. Calcutta pp. 31-68.

Dupleix to Burat 28.10.1737. B.N.Fr 8980 of 43V.

The most persistent complaint of the French against the authorities was that of 'unjust pretensions and exactions'. These would usually take the form of demands of a specific sum, generally as compensation for losses caused to the government or as a fine for some breach of law. Gifts were also demanded as part of an agreement to secure some privilege. The easiest way to enforce these demands was to stop boats carrying goods from one French factory to another. As an alternative, or along with it, merchants and others in service of the company could be put into prison or harrassed otherwise. Both were favourite modes of operation of Haji Ahmed and Alamchand at Murshidabad. The Haji's formidable position is quite apparent from the numerous references to him. It was to this self-styled 'Father and Protector of the Nations' . . . 'the most wicked and the most intelligent' member of the Nawab's entourage that one had to appeal for restitution of rights over a village, for securing payment of outstanding dues from influential debtors, for a reduction of 'presents' demanded by his brother, the Nawab of Patna. The French paid him an annual pension of eighteen hundred rupees to 'keep him out of mischief'.<sup>22</sup> The Haji's mischief making could range from attempts to prohibit European traders to send gomastas to the silk-*arangs* and occasional revival of the Farman affair, to cooking up (according to Dupleix) of serious charges, aimed at harming Dupleix himself.<sup>23</sup> Early in 1740, Dupleix noted that the 'protector' was also going to be the king-maker and regretted his consequent 'insolence and excessive power'.<sup>24</sup> However, in spite of all his abuses and curses against Haji Ahmed, including a prophetic one that sooner or later a terrible storm would break over his head,<sup>25</sup> Dupleix generally ordered Burat to comply with his demand whenever it was a question of securing an easy passage for the Patna fleet. Apart from the fact that haggling with Haji Ahmed never took one far, Dupleix and Burat, like many others, utilised the fleet to send goods on their private account. Rather than attracting the Company's attention to his, he preferred to pay off

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22. Memoir (anonymous) on Cassimbazar d. 1738. N.A. 9226 f. 20.

23. Letters of Dupleix to Burat 7.3.1735.

Ar. 4743 f 5; to Burat 3.9.1739. B.N.Fr 8982 ff 117-117V; Dumas 10.1.1740. Ibid; to de Volton 18.1.1740. Ibid ff 227V-228.

24. Dupleix to Burat 3.9.1739. Ibid f. 117

25. Dupleix to Burat 23.12.1738 B.N.Fr 8981 f. 50.

quietly these extra sums out of his own pocket. Along with his instructions to Burat not to put down these sums in the Company's book, there are suggestions that these expenses would be made up elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

Alamchand generally figures less on his own than the other advisers of Shuja-ud-din in contemporary European records. However, one episode which finds a good deal of reference in the letters of Dupleix brings out in clear relief the influence of Alamchand's family at the court of Murshidabad. Harilal, a nephew of Alamchand had sent nine bales of silk to Surat in 1735 aboard a private French ship, the 'Chandernagore'. Martin, the French agent at Surat sold them, and remitted the product by a bill of exchange; he had to be in a hurry, as according to Dupleix, Harilal, like all Bengalis could not bear to be 'separated' from his capital for a long time and was daily harrasing him for his money. On receipt of the money, Harilal (who probably resided in Hooghli) complained to Alamchand that he had received less than his due; silk was selling at a higher rate in Surat. Harilal's mother, the 'Lady-in-Waiting' of the mother of Alamchand seems to have had enough influence on the former to put all sorts of pressure on the French. A number of their boats carrying merchandise to Hooghli were stopped; the Vakils of Indranarayan Chaudhuri, the chief broker of the French, were arrested at Murshidabad. The Harilal affair dragged on for more than a year (mid 1736 mid 1737). The 'witch' had, according to Dupleix succeeded in bringing French trade almost to a standstill during this period. The leading merchants of Hooghli headed by Mohammed Fazal, as well as the Faujdar of that town sided with the French, but their combined efforts came to nothing. Dupleix finally had to agree to terms almost forced on him by Harilal or rather his mother. Further resistance according to him would have meant failure to send off the ships within the season; only his keen awareness of his duties to Company forced him to accept such a 'country justice' which ignored the local merchants' verdict in

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26. Letters of Dupleix to Burat 7.9.1735 Ar 4743 f 26;

3.6.1736 Ibid f. 95

23.6.1736 Ibid f. 97

27.6.1736 Ibid f. 98



matters of trade in order to appease the greed of outsiders.<sup>27</sup> The misogynist in him made him react more violently to Harilal's mother than to Alamchand, whose inability to control his own family was, however, duly noted.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is the omnipresence of Fatehchand that strikes one most as one goes through the private and official correspondence of the French traders during this period. As with the English, so with the French, his exclusive control of the bullion market in Bengal, and his resistance to their attempts to bypass it became a regular issue of conflict.<sup>29</sup> Dupleix was always reminding others that the French and the Dutch were on the same footing in Bengal so far as the privileges accorded to them by the Farmans and parwanas were concerned. The right to carry their own bullion to the mint in Murshidabad was one such privilege, which was formerly enjoyed by the French. Dislocation of French trade for some time past led them to discontinue this practice. Now that they were doing considerable trade in Bengal, and had become, so to say, a Nation to reckon with, Dupleix wanted to revive this legitimate privilege. It was only the greed of Fatehchand the greed and inordinately powerful 'gentil' that foiled all attempts of the French to take the bullion directly to the mint. Instead, they were obliged to sell their entire import of bullion to the agent of Fatehchand, at a price dictated by the latter and incur a loss of 4%.<sup>30</sup>

27. Dupleix to Burat— 23.6.1736 : Ar 4743 f 97-V

8.7.1736 Ibid f 100

24.7.1736 Ar 4744 f 1

5.8.1736 Ibid f 5

11.9.1736 Ibid f 12V

24.9.1736 Ibid f 14V

6.11.1736 Ibid f 18

Dupleix to Martin (Chief at Surat) :

16.12.1736 Ar 4744 f 39.

24.1.1737 Ibid f 78V

9.3.1737 Ibid f 85V

26.6.1737 B.N.Fr. 8980 f 10V.

28. Dupleix to Burat 22.11.1736 Ar 4744 f. 21.

29. On the conflict between Fatehchand and the English see Little J.H. House of Jagat Seth 1967, Calcutta, pp. 81-86; Bhattacharya op. cit., pp. 24-25, also *ibid*, the chapter Mints and Currency.

30. Dupleix to Forestieri 11.11.1731 B.N.Fr. 8979 f 6-6V; 2.9.1732 & *Ibid* f 50V. Dupleix to Directors 14.1.1732 *Ibid* f 22V.

For almost a year after his arrival in Bengal Dupleix kept harping on the unfairness of this procedure, as, according to him all the European companies but the French were actually enjoying this concession. He specially refers to the Dutch. As we know that the fate of at least the English were quite similar to the French in this respect, his insistence on this point seems rather to reflect his ignorance of the actual state of affairs.<sup>31</sup> The situation had greatly changed since the last quarter of the seventeenth century, when, in the opinion of a European company, the best way to dispose of its imported bullion was to sell it to a dependable Indian buyer if one was lucky to find one. No one questioned the privilege of having their bullion coined at the mint at Rajmahal. It also yielded more profit. However, the risks involved were far too many. Boatloads of treasure could get drowned or robbed; a trip to and from Rajmahal, including the delay at the mint usually took considerable time. Hence the problem, in those days was that of finding a buyer of bullion, not of avoiding him.<sup>32</sup>

Dupleix, at his arrival was obviously not aware of the great changes that had taken place in the system with the rise of the Jagatseth family. Even before he came to Bengal he was convinced of the advantages of the privilege referred to. In a memoir written from Pondichery in 1727 he considered the concession as worth securing even at considerable expense.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the greater part of the next year Dupleix was busy negotiating for this concession, suggesting bargaining terms to the envoys, explaining the situation to Forestieri his contact man in Delhi.<sup>34</sup> It was only towards September 1732, that a better grasp of the local conditions occasionally tended to modify his views on the subject. In his letter of 2 September 1732 to

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31. Our present state of knowledge about the Dutch East India Company in Bengal during the first half of the 18th century does not permit any conclusive statement. The standard works do not make any specific reference to this. See for example Datta K. K: *The Dutch in Bengal and Behar* (1740-1825) Patna 1948; Bhattacharya, S. op. cit. *Om Prakash the Dutch East India Company in Bengal: Trade privileges and problems, 1633-1712* in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. Sept. 1872 pp. 218-287.

32. Chaudhuri Susil: *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal 1650-1720*, Calcutta 1975 pp. 100-110.

33. *Memoire sur les Etablissements de la compagnie et sur son Commerce dans les Indes Orientales*. Published in *Revue Historique de l'Inde Francaise* Vol. I (1916-1917) Pondichery. pp. 112-114.

34. *Supra* Note 30.

Forestieri he remarks that as the profit secured from this concession are 'very insignificant' he is not prepared to pay a considerable sum to the Imperial Court in order to secure it. Any payment to 'the Mogol' would involve a similar if not larger one to the local court. So all that he wishes is that the authorities at Delhi would consider the terms of the Farmans and parwanas, and would make him the favour of a 'gratuitous' permission. His letters to the Directors at home however betray his persistent keenness for securing this concession.<sup>35</sup>

The French were also made to feel the influence of Fatehchand in another sphere. For the English and the French one way of bypassing the latter's control over the bullion market was to import considerable quantities of Madras and Arcot rupees in Bengal which was accepted at discount by the local money market. Fatehchand naturally resented this; he could also convince the government about the consequent loss of revenue acquired from the use of the mint. In 1737 he managed to raise the batta on Arcot rupees coined in Pondichery in such a way so as to discourage merchants and artisans to receive payment in these coins. This practically amounted to a prohibition on the circulation of the Arcot rupees. The affair was settled by the beginning of 1738, after the French paid 40,000 rupees to the Nawab, and accepted a new rate of batta.<sup>36</sup> Besides the spheres of mint and currency, Fatehchand was also indispensable as their most important money lender. Try as he may to do without Fatehchand, the 'greatest of Jews' and 'our chopping-block' Dupleix often had to seek loans of one to three lakhs of rupees from him.<sup>37</sup>

35. Dupleix to Forestieri 2.9.1732, B.N.Fr. 8979 f 50V.

Dupleix to Directors 30.9.1732 Ibid f 74V

Dupleix to Hardancourt 18.1.1733. Ibid f 92V.

36. For Dupleix's version of the Arcot rupee affair; see his letters to Burat 5.8.1737 B.N.Fr. 8980 f 27

23.10.1737 Ibid f 42

26.12.1737 Ibid f 84

to Dumas 15.3.1738 Ibid f 113V

8.5.1738 Ibid f 129

see Martineau op. cit. pp. 402-437 for a detailed discussion of the whole affair.

37 Letter of Dupleix to Burat 21.4.1735 Ar. 4743 f 9

20.2.1736 Ar. 4743 f 71

27.10.1738 B.N.Fr. 8981 f 1V

23.12.1738 Ibid f 50

Dupleix to Martineau op cit p. 371; 1.10.1739 B.N.Fr. 8982 f 129  
Dumas.

Apart from creating difficulties in the money market, Fatehchand could be a nuisance in other ways in order to put further pressure on somebody who had displeased him. The boats of French gomostas at Maldah were stopped at his order apparently because Dupleix had not replied to his letter.<sup>38</sup> In December 1738 boats of the Armenian Khoja Mirza carrying goods to be freighted on private French ships were prevented from making further progress, as one of his previous employees, a debtor of Fatehchand had failed to pay up his dues.<sup>39</sup> Dupleix held him responsible for much of the harrassment caused to Indranarayan, as Fatechand suspected the broker behind the French negotiations for minting privileges.<sup>40</sup> Fatehchand came to be regarded by him as the most feared person in Bengal, whose orders carried more weight throughout the province than those of the Nawab himself.<sup>41</sup> Finally, it is to him rather than anybody else that Dupleix attributes the disorders of the province following the invasion of Nadir Shah and the death of Shuja-ud-din. It was a period of wild rumours and misgivings. Sarafraj was said to be behaving in a most contradictory and irresponsible manner, which would sooner or later bring down the wrath of the invader (or of Nizam ul Moulk, the new 'all in all' man in Mughal politics) on the province. Dupleix concludes by remarking 'all this is done according to the scoundrel Fatehchand, who, seeing his own downfall imminent and certain, wants, at the same time, to bring about the downfall of a province whose blood he has been sucking, till the last drop, since a long time'.<sup>42</sup>

In the sphere of trade Burat and Dupleix had also to deal often with the Katmas, a rich and powerful family of merchants at Cassimbazar. They were substantial money lenders, and had special hold over at least one section of silk winders and merchants. The factors contributing to this hold are not clear. Money-lending had certainly to do with it. Dupleix also hints at the patronage of Fatehchand. They could occasionally push up the price of silk.<sup>43</sup>

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38. Dupleix to Burat 20.3.1736 Ar. 4743 f 83

22.4.1736 Ar. Ibid 93V-94V

39. Dupleix to Burat 5.12.1738 B.N.Fr. 8981 f 38V

23.12.1738 Ibid f 49V.

40. Dupleix to Burat 3.11.1738 B.N.Fr. 8981 f 4

41. Dupleix to Burat—28.3.1736 Ar 4743 f 83V

to Dumas 1.10.1739 B N Fr. 8982 f 129

42. Dupleix to Dumas 24.4.1739 B N Fr. 8982 f 64V

43. Dupleix to Burat 17.3.1735 Ar. 4343 f 6.

Silk winders agreeing to work for the French at a lower rate were once whipped and forced to pay a fine of two hundred rupees, at the instigation of the Katmas. On receiving a long letter from them Dupleix instructed Burat to lend them this sum. These artisans deserved sympathy, he said, because their trouble was due to their having worked for the French at a cheaper rate.<sup>44</sup> Several of them were also *ryots* of the French Company, residing in a village in French possession, adjacent to their factory at Cassimbazar.<sup>45</sup> On the whole Dupleix was not in favour of dealing with these 'rich and influential rogues' unless unforeseen shortage of money forced him to ask them for loans.<sup>46</sup>

A lot of these problems and constraints were, as already seen, common to all European traders in Bengal. Seen through the eyes of the traders themselves, they are obviously not to be always taken at their face value, and can at best be taken as revealing the existing system only partially.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, many of the points raised remain unexplained, specially questions concerning details of revenue and judicial administration. One such question concerns ownership of land by individual Europeans in Mughal India. While there are many references to such ownership being illegal, we find Burat negotiating for restitution of the village Sukhchar which was bought from

44. Dupleix to Burat 27.10.1735 Ar. 4743 f 30.

In two earlier letters Dupleix refers to the indebtedness of the silk winders for a sum of 804 rupees to Kunjabehari, a local merchant. Rameshwar Pal is mentioned as one of the forty three master winders working for the French. See Dupleix to Burat. 26.2.1735 Ar. 4743 f 4

21.5.1735 Ibid f 10.

5.11.1736 Ar. 4744 f 16V.

45. According to N.A. 9226 op. cit. f 19, the village was called Batatoul. Captain Darrac in his lengthy memoir on the French establishments in Bengal (dated 1822) C<sup>2</sup>11 3 f 208 refers to the same village as Bamanghatty.

46. Dupleix to Burat 22.10.1735 Ar. 4743 f. 29V.

20.3.1735 Ibid f. 81V.

3.4.1737 Ar. 4744 f. 87V.

16.4.1737 B.N.Fr. 8980 ff I-IV.

47 See the works of Bhattacharya S., OM. Prakash and Chaudhuri S. Op. cit. for similarity of problems faced by other European traders at an earlier period.

Okamastry, a Dutch, by Delabat, a French resident of Chandernagore, but was later 'unjustly' taken away by the Faujdar of Hooghli.<sup>48</sup>

A more fundamental problem is the position of the Indian merchants vis-a-vis the government. In spite of the incomplete nature of the evidences, details of the career of Indranarayan Chaudhuri, the broker at Chandernagore, as revealed in the letters of Dupleix deserve attention in this context. Indranarayan, together with his brother Rajaram, and his sons and nephews enjoyed considerable wealth and social eminence. As chief broker of the French and the ijaradar of Chandernagore, he was obviously the right hand man of Dupleix, explaining obscure points of a concession, offering guarantee for defaulting merchants, getting ready the delicate and difficult assignments of embroidered goods from Dacca or Jamdanis from Radhanagar at the scheduled time.<sup>49</sup> His complicity with the Director in spheres of private trade, as well as his complete hold on the life of the Bengalis in Chandernagore are discussed in detail in a memoir of 1747. Although it concerns Burat, the successor of Dupleix as Governor, it gives an idea of Indranarayan's influence for the period in general.<sup>50</sup> However, his position brought him a great deal of risk as well. It is curious to find the names of all the leading members of the Murshidabad court in the details of problems faced by him. We have seen his Vakils at the Murshidabad court being imprisoned by Alamchand during the Harilal affair. He was also

48. Dupleix to Burat 24.7.1736 : Ar 4744 f. 1  
58.1736 Ibid f. 3V

Whatever is so far known about the acquisition of the territory of Chandernagore also indicates that the French Company and individuals were enjoying Talukdari and Ijaradari rights over some of the villages that constituted the French settlement. Some of these rights were purchased in 'benami' but its real nature could not have been hidden from the local government officials. The whole question, however, needs thorough examination. For a resumé of documents relating to land rights acquired by the French see the Memoir of Duval de Leyrit (5.9.1748) N.A. 9353 ff 39-43V.

49. For Dupleix's assessment of Indranarayan see, for example, the following :

Dupleix to Burat 27.8. 1736 Ar. 4744 f 10V.  
15.11.1736 B.N.Fr. 8981 ff 3-4  
27.10.1738 Ar. 4744 f 20V.

50. Memoire by M.de Montaran 'maitre des requetes', Intendant du Commerce et Commissaire de la Regie de la compagnie.  
C<sup>34</sup> ff 149-163..

the target of Fatehchand's attack who considered Indranarayan responsible for the demand of minting privileges. To some extent it can be explained by the usual device of the local government to reach a recalcitrant European Company through attacks on its principal local contacts. In the case of the French Company moreover, its position might have been considered by the government to be relatively insignificant, and dependant mainly on the reputation of its broker. Dupleix often felt genuinely upset to find the Katmas or Fatehchand refusing credit to the French Company on the ground of Indranarayan's (alleged) indebtedness. He took great pain to explain to Burat (who was to pass on the message) that the reputation of the French Company did not depend solely on Indranarayan, and the Company's ability to pay its debts were never subject to its broker's financial position.<sup>51</sup>

The two elements came together in a striking incident in Indranarayan's life. In March 1738, a woman and her child were found dead in Chandernagore. It was reported to the Darbar as a case of murder, with hints of French involvement in the affair. The Cassimbazar factory was surrounded by the Nawab's men, and Burat, on behalf of the French was charged with the crime. After a lot of explaining and bargaining, and a payment of 10,000 rupees in all to various officers (Haji Ahmed and the Faujdar of Hooghli among them) the affair was taken to be settled. However, in October Indranarayan was arrested at Hooghli and taken to Murshidabad on the same charge, and released only after paying the exorbitant sum of 120,000 rupees. Social ostracism, resulting from this scandal was perhaps an even greater blow to Indranarayan, from which he never recovered fully. Dupleix detected in turn the hands of Haji Ahmed, Alamchand and Fatehchand in the whole affair. While the first was actually trying to teach Dupleix a lesson, both he and Alamchand were more bent upon squeezing money out of a man of means. Fatehchand was interested to see a person instigating his master to encroach upon his sphere of influence being cut down to size.

Once the financial side was settled, through the mediation of Khoja Kamal and with the help of a liberal loan from the French, Indranarayan was duly granted an audience by the Nabab and

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51. Dupleix to Burat : 20.7.1735 Ar. 4743 f 21  
2.4.1736 Ibid f. 84

presented with a shiropah.<sup>52</sup> Nothing illustrates better the reaction of a European observer to this entire system of punishment followed almost as a matter of course by the ritual rein-statement than the following observation, in an anonymous memoir of 1738 :—

‘When the Nabab wants to extract large sums of money, he has to show that he is doing justly. To this end, it is one of his ministers whom he asks to deal with the party whom they want to harrass. And this minister always uses a third person. If we want the affair to succeed, the Nabab, the minister and the third person have to be satisfied and . . . there are fifty petty officers who are to be satisfied also. When the affair is settled and everyone is content, the unlucky one is conducted in front of the Nabab to whom one says ‘so and so who is present here begs you this grace although it is against the custom, and offers you so much as gift.’ Then the Nabab accords the grace by giving the serpo (Shiropah), a present which usually consists of a cabaye, a Toque and belt of some rich material, and sometimes a horse. This serpo has the authority to render more white than snow, a scoundrel who is black with the most horrible crimes, if he has enough money to avoid punishment and to buy his life back!’ One is not surprised to learn that the author gets all these details from M. Burat ‘who has made a great study of the way the people of this country act’.<sup>53</sup>

Scholars have rightly argued, that much of the growing tension and conflict between the local government and the European traders was due to the extension of European private trade, protected by the privileges enjoyed by the various East India Companies.<sup>54</sup> Letters of Dupleix contain brief but revealing evidence of his stand concerning this question. Side by side with his continuous outburst against the ‘wickedness’, ‘faithlessness’ and above all non fulfilment of the terms of the agreements, Dupleix comments frankly on details of ‘the game’ of organizing private shipping under the Company’s name. Once, in 1736 Villeneuve, an ‘arrogant and indiscreet’ newcomer, a protégé of

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52. Dupleix to Volton 18.1.1740 B.N.Fr. 8982 ff 226-228, contain most of the informations utilized in this paper. See also Martineau *Op. cit.* pp. 180-183.

Dupleix to Directors 6.1.1739 B.N.Fr. 8981 ff 66V-68V.

Dupleix to Burat 18.11.1738 B.N.Fr. 8991 8 V.

53. N.A. 9226 *Op. cit.* f 20.

54. See the works mentioned in Note 47 and Marshall P. J. *Op. cit.*



Castanier, one of the Directors had bragged about his private enterprise, and had almost smashed up the whole set-up of sea-borne private trade of the French in Bengal. Dupleix's letters to Castanier and Dumas, the Governor of Pondichery are full of indignation against Villeneuve's imprudence 'You will be surprised' he tells Dumas in 1737 'if you were here, to see the number of difficulties which we face every day and the precautions we have to take to hide our game. It is a very special knowledge, which can be acquired by long practice' ... All private trade is forbidden to us here, unless we submit to exorbitant duties which often go up to 25%...'. Hence all private trade is carried on under the name of the Company, and 'only the Chief appears at the head of all transactions' ... it is to him that one addresses, to nobody else'. The 'Maures' were naturally 'always on the look out to find out whether we were doing private trade'. They created such an uproar about Villeneuve's enterprise that Dupleix finally had to take an oath (in the Indian manner, by swearing by his head, he explains) in the presence of the customs officers that trip was really organized by the Company.<sup>55</sup> Dupleix had also commented on the authority's attempt to check unauthorized English private trade. But this point is never brought up in his analysis of the 'greed' and 'faithlessness' of the latter.

In another letter, written to Directors at home in January 1740, Dupleix points out to them that the Company makes an annual saving of 500,000 rupees in Bengal, through manipulation (the details are not explained) in paying its dues, and from the revenue of its settlements. 'This profit' he assures them frankly 'enables us to be in a position to bear all the exactions which the Maures impose on us from time to time, and which never reach even 1/10th of the gain, which you have made so far'.<sup>56</sup> Even if we remember his tendency to exaggerate the importance or significance of his own achievements, and his refusal to admit the weak points of his pro-

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55 Dupleix to de Castanier 10.1.1737 : Ar 4744 f 48V,  
to Duvalaer 10.1.1737 Ar. 4744 ff 56-57,  
to Dumas 31.3.1737 B.N.Fr. 8980 ff 19-19V.

The whole affair offers an almost exact parallel to another (recorded) incident taking place 23 years ago. Hardancourt, the Director of Chandernagore in 1714 complains to the company how the indiscreet declaration of M. Grangemont, a private trader brought trouble to the company's trade; letter of Hardancourt to the company C<sup>69</sup> ff 122-122V.

56. Dupleix to Directors 14.1.1740 B.N.Fr. 8982 ff 210V-211.

ject, this statement indicates fairly clearly what he considered to be the 'essential point' of the Company's trade in Bengal.<sup>57</sup>

Further clarification of many obscure points is needed to examine more fully the nature of the local government and that of European presence in Bengal. But from the above indications one can perhaps conclude once more that the European trader could not do without a system of special concessions which would allow them, among other things, to carry on their private trade under the Company's protection. The position of a mere trader, on the same footing with other merchants was untenable with these claims. The absence of this special position was often synonymous with 'insults', as for example in a trade memoir by Vincens, a veteran private merchant. Writing in December 1733 from Chandernagore he points out the obstacles in the path of European private traders trying to enter the sphere of inland trade. After going through the usual reflections on lack of knowledge of local customs and local languages, he concludes that 'they will be moreover subject to a thousand troubles and insults to which the natives are subject, from the governors of towns and Chiefs of villages, with the difference that the Gentils, Maures and Armenians (who dominate inland trade) would suffer more easily an affront than a European . . .'.<sup>58</sup>

The viewpoint of a European trader in Bengal of the 1730s thus does not necessarily and simply reflect the natural reaction of a community with a long tradition of charters and customs at home, demarcating and upholding its privileges at home. Through all expressions of bewilderment and righteous indignation at the face of violation of declared principles by their host, their anger betrays also the failure to secure special concessions, somewhat in the nature of the privileges enjoyed by so many Mughal officials in Bengal, whose extensive private trade was backed by his political position.<sup>59</sup> If neither Farmans, nor temporary arrangements based on bargaining and custom could procure these special concessions,

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57. For an illustration of these aspects of his nature see his letter to the company dated 23.11.1738. BNFr. 8981 ff 11-20.

58. C<sup>2</sup>56 f 46.

59. Sarkar J. N. op. cit. 274-292,

Ray Indrani : *Les Commerçants Français au Bengal 1686-1757*.

Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Paris 1967 pp. 189-191.

Choudhuri S. op. cit. pp. 92-93.

barred to a mere merchant, however influential he might be, the path lay perhaps in seeking the status of a Mughal nobleman. In the following section we will see Dupleix groping through various means to ensure the special privileges till he started thinking in terms of such a solution, even though he himself was not very clear about its full implication.

## II

In dealing with problems of trade, Dupleix, as we have seen, mostly followed the customary path of negotiating with the right contacts at the Murshidabad court. Besides the leading figures, a number of other personages appear in his letters, including "the nurse of the second person in the government" who was approached at a critical moment of negotiations in November 1732.<sup>59a</sup>

However, although getting things done in this way, Dupleix often shows his preference for the Imperial Court, to whom he attributes greater power and sense of justice. This inclination is already visible in the memoir written by him at Pondichery in 1727. In it he suggests appealing to the 'Great Mogol' for securing the much sought after minting concessions rather than to Murshidabad. But the factors shaping this assessment are not quite clear from what we know of Dupleix's early career in Pondichery (1722-1731).

He continues to hold the Imperial Court in considerable esteem as reflected in his letters to Foresteri in Delhi, during 1731 and 1732. In his letter of 11 November 1731 he mentions 'Kandorakan' (Samsam-ud-Daulah Khan-i-Dauran, the Mir Bakshi) as 'the real governor of Bengal, Shuja-ud-Din merely acting as a subordinate representative.'<sup>61</sup> (Whereas the Khan-i-Dauran's important role in bringing about the accession of Shuja-ud-Din is well known, his nomination as the Subahdar of Bengal remains much less publicized).<sup>62</sup>

59a. Dupleix to Directors 30.11.1732 B.N.Fr. 8979 f 74

60. Dupleix's Memoir, Op. cit. p. 114.

61. Dupleix to Forestieri 11.11.1731 B.N.Fr. 8979 f. 6.

62. Only the Riaz-u-Salatīn specifically refers to Khan-i-Dauran's nomination as Subahdar of Bengal from English to Bengali by Akharuddin, Bangla Academy, Dacca, 1974, pp. 226-227. On Khan-i-Dauran's role as the protector of Shuja-ul-Din see Seir Mutequherin op. cit. vol. I. pp. 277-278; for other details see Malik Zohiruddin : Khan-i-Dauran, the Mir Bakshi of

Dupleix wanted Forestieri to approach this 'Seigneur' for securing the minting concessions and also an order to his 'Lieutenant' to treat us a little better than he had done so far.<sup>63</sup> By September 1732 Dupleix had turned to another important personage, 'Diasin Sanay' who is most probably Sawai Jai Singh.<sup>64</sup> In this letter Dupleix is very explicit about the various misdeeds of the Nabab 'the greatest wretch on this earth'. 'I cannot understand' he continues 'how people of his type can hold themselves in such a prominent position . . . . no doubt our Nation will take revenge if ultimately the Moghul court takes no step. However, Dupleix was . . . 'sure they do not know in your court all that is done by this scoundrel . . . if they knew, they would remedy it', and urges Forestieri to provide the court with the necessary details.<sup>65</sup> Later in the decade we find him suggesting negotiations with Nizam-ul-Mulk for a more favourable conclusion of the Arcot rupee affair and securing better justice for Indranarayan.<sup>66</sup>

By the middle of the decade it begins to dawn on Dupleix that orders from Delhi were not going to have any effect in Bengal, unless the Imperial power took a more direct interest in affairs of that province. Its aloofness was partly responsible for the growing tyranny of the local Darbar. This tyranny was however not based on any real strength. In spite of the Darbar's ability to make life impossible for the Europeans, the Nawab's power, according to Dupleix, was actually quite limited. As proof to his point, Dupleix refers to the alarming growth of 'chowkies' along the river route connecting the important production centres and markets with Chandernagore. These were set up by local Chiefs and landholders,

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Muhammed Shah in Mediaeval India : a Miscellany Aligarh, 1969 pp. 229-230, 232. Chandra, Satish : Parties and Politics in Mughal India. 1969. Delhi p. 210.

63. B.N.Fr. 8979 f. 6V.

64. Dupleix to Forestieri. 29.1732. B.N.Fr. 8979 ff 50V-52. It would have been difficult to identify 'Diasin Sanay' as Jai Singh, without the references to 'this person's keen interest in astronomy mentioned by Dupleix in this letter.

65. Ibid f 51V.

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|----------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 66. Dupleix to Burat | 23.10.1737 | B.N.Fr. 8980 of 42  |
| Dumas                | 8.7.1739   | B.N.Fr. 8982 of 81V |
| Dirois               | 13.7.1739  | Ibid 89-81V         |
| De Volton            | 18.1.1740  | Ibid 227V           |

B.N. 9353 of 42.

encouraged by the governments weakness.<sup>67</sup> The Nabab's orders were moreover disregarded with impunity by the Faujdar of Hooghli, when he was instructed to make a group of defaulting zamindars pay their due to Indranarayan Chaudhuri.<sup>68</sup> All this would mean a sudden and drastic decline of the Nawab's power, if one remembers the words of Alexander Hume, Chief of the Ostend Company. As late as 1730 Hume had commented on the immense influence of the Nawab's family and the great regard for his parawanas throughout the province.<sup>69</sup> In fact the increased number of chowkies as well as the indifference to the Nabab's orders might mean some sort of an understanding between the Darbar, the zamindars and important officials. Aware of the diminishing hold of the centre on the province, local rulers must have found it easier to ignore such manifestations of local autonomy as long as their most vital interests were not compromised.<sup>70</sup>

Dupleix moreover attributed much of this 'intolerable state of affairs' to the submissive attitude of the Europeans in Bengal. The English and the Dutch were the most to blame for complying too readily with all unjustified demands. As a result the government had become insatiable, and Dupleix, in spite of his strong reservations to such practices had to bear the consequences.<sup>71</sup> As a member of the

67. Dupleix to Directors 14.1.1732 op cit f. 21V

Dupleix to Forestieri 29.1732 op. cit f. 51V

It was usual for European traders to find in this definite proof of (a) the centre's weakness vis-a-vis the province and (b) the provincial ruler's weakness vis-a-vis the local magnates; For example de la Blanchetiere in his letter to the company 25.8.1723. C<sup>5</sup>72 ff 399-400, declares Murshid Kuli Khan's power as 'extremely limited' for identical reasons. For an excellent analysis of the whole problem of rahadari dues see Om Prakash op. cit. pp 275-276. who shows that 'weakness' was not the whole explanation behind the system. See also infra Note 70

68. Dupleix to Burat 18.3.1756 Ar 4743 f 81.

24.1736 Ibid f. 84

69. Narang Indira : The Ostend Company's Records and the 'Instruction' of Alexander Hume in Indian Economic and Social History Review Vol. IV No. I p. 35.

70. Calkins Philip B : The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal 1700-1740 in Journal of Asian Studies Vol. 29 No. 4 pp. 799-806; Ray Ratnalekha : The Bengal Zamindars Local Magnates and the State before the Permanent settlement in IESHR Vol. XII No. 3 pp. 280-281.

71. Dupleix to Dumas 4.4.1739 B.N.Fr. 8982 f. 58.

Pondichery Council he had already participated in discussions favouring a policy of 'more energetic action' by Chandernagore. The actual steps were left to the latter.<sup>72</sup> A few years later, (in 1732) as the Governor of French Settlements in Bengal, Dupleix explained to his authorities what he wanted them to do. He was convinced that if they sent two or three well-armed ships carrying about three hundred soldiers, in order to put a stop to all trade on the Hooghly river, the government would soon be obliged to come to terms.<sup>73</sup> In 1739 he asked permission to carry out a project 'simple and ... not expensive' in order to make the 'Maures' see reason. Details of this project, however, are not known.<sup>74</sup> Alternately he would suggest European withdrawal from trade for a certain period. The English had actually done so in 1736, causing him, if not the government, a lot of worry, as he relied a good deal on the Calcutta market for buying goods in demand at Patna.<sup>75</sup> The basis of these suggestions was his conviction that the Bengal government was heavily dependent upon European trade—for regular remittance of the 'Cajena' to Delhi.<sup>76</sup>

However, authorities at home would not think of permitting such a course of action. Relationship between the different European Companies ruled out all possibility of bringing about joint pressure on the local authorities. Understanding between the members of the European communities on matters concerning private trade was helpful in many cases, but not of a nature to go beyond limited objectives. In a few revealing passages Dupleix blamed the founders of the Company for having made such a harmful distinction between the French Company and the rest of the French 'nation'. This led the local government to treat the French individuals as 'extraordinary animals' ...deserving no respect or consideration.<sup>77</sup> It is again the

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72. Pondichery to Chandernagore 28.2.1730 C.P. Vol I 56-57.

73. Dupleix to Directors 30.11.1732 B.N.Fr. 8979 f. 74V.

74. Dupleix to Directors 6.1.1739 B.N.Fr. 8981 f. 68V.

75. Dupleix to Groiselle, chief of the French factory at Patna

10.4.1736 Ar 4743 f 85V

30.4.1736 Ibid f 94

6.1736 Ibid f 95V

3.7.1736 Ibid f 100

76 Dupleix to Forestieri 2.9.1732 B.N.Fr. 8979 f. 52

Dupleix to Burat 28. 3. 1736 Ar. 4743 f 84

77 Dupleix to Dumas 4.4.1739. B.N.Fr. 8982 ff. 58-59.

voice of the irate private trader, impatient with the entire system of restrictions at several levels. But it was too early to think consistently in terms of ending the Company's monopoly. By 1738 Dupleix was resigned to a situation where, according to him, Murshidabad laughed at Delhi's orders, and Hooghli ignored the Nawab's parawanas. Whatever little could be achieved, depended it seems, on special attention to have such orders accompanied by extra pomp and glamour, like a 'golden seal' or the substitution of a 'chopdar' by a *gourousbar-dar* as the bearer of imperial message.<sup>78</sup>

The invasion of Nadir Shah had a bewildering effect on him. For a brief, heady spell, he seems to have given himself up to dreams of a great change, a revolution to upset the existing order of things. He just could not get over the fact that such a power as the Mughal empire could accept defeat with so little resistance. After some initial misgivings he tended to enjoy the prospect of finding the French settlements in India under a strong reputed ruler, whom, moreover, he liked to think as favourably inclined to Europeans in general and to the French in particular.<sup>79</sup> When Fatehchand delayed over a French demand for loan in 1739 and went on transporting his treasure to Hooghli, Dupleix commented on his lack of any sense. Couldn't he see that his money would have the greatest security in European hands, who were the least likely to feel the strains of the coming 'revolution'?<sup>80</sup> His letters to Groiselle, chief of the French factory at Patna show his eagerness to find means to approach Nadir Shah through his European followers 'lay or religious'.<sup>81</sup> The French national susceptibility to 'gloire' possibly accounts for his spontaneous anger against Fatehchand and others on hearing reports or rumours of their instigating Sarafraj Khan to resist Nadir Shah, the 'new Alexander'.<sup>82</sup>

The laconic mention of the conqueror's departure from India, in letters of a later date would not convince anyone who knows the

78. Dupleix to Burat 2.4.1736 Ar. 4742 f. 84  
to de Volton 18.1.1740 B.N.Fr. 8982 f. 228.

79. Dupleix to Dumas 4.4.1739 B.N.Fr. 8982 ff. 57-59.  
24.4.1739 Ibid f. 64.

80. Dupleix to Burat 18.1.1739 B.N.Fr. 8982 f. 23V

81. Dupleix to Groiselle 3.4.1739 Ibid f. 57-57V

82. Dupleix to Burat 20.3.1739 Ibid f. 54V;  
" to Dumas 24.4.1739 Ibid ff 64V  
" to Groiselle 24.4.1739 Ibid f. 66.

working of his mind. As with other cases of frustration Dupleix was capable of hiding his disappointment to others behind off-hand references to this departure, along with tit-bits of gossip about the treasure Nadir Shah carried away. He was apparently condemned to fall back upon the old devices. However, as we have seen already, the European private trader was becoming increasingly more impatient of a system that kept him on the footing of an ordinary merchant. His claims, to be satisfied, required nothing short of the position of one of those Mughal officials who had utilised their position to secure trade privileges denied to anybody else. Time and circumstances had seen the dwindling of such favoured 'merchants' in Bengal.<sup>83</sup> Dupleix represented a community of new pretenders to that position.

An unusual proposal from de Volton at this juncture pointed exactly to the possibility of securing for the European trader the status of a Mughal noble. De Volton a French deserter turned physician at the Mughal court was the latest spokesman of Dupleix there. In 1739, he actually offered through Groiselle, to get the French Governors of Pondichery and Chandernagore, mansabdaris, which they were to receive on behalf of the Company.<sup>84</sup> Dupleix's reactions reflect hesitation and confusion, along with some assertions about the benefits of such a title. He was quite clear about it in his letter of 10 January 1740 to Dumas. He had consulted experienced and trusted advisers, and was convinced that a title of Panch Hazari (nothing less would do) would be of great help 'in avoiding in Bengal a lot of harrassment. It is the greatest mark of distinction and of protection that one can obtain from the Mogol and which would, on many occasions, check the avidity of the miserable government with whom we have to do ... the Company and the Nation would be much more respected than they are now...'.<sup>85</sup> It would seem that, Dupleix was cured only partially of his illusions about a distant but powerful central authority. It is also worth noting that he considers all protection and privilege incomplete unless they incude both the Company and the French nation—having in mind the private and free merchants.

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83. Om Prakash *Asian Trade and European impact: A study of the trade from Bengal, 1630-1720* W Paper 133 (unpublished) Delhi School of Economics June 1974 pp. 18-26

84. Dupleix to Groiselle 31.8.1739 B.N.Fr. 8982 f 115V

85. Dupleix to Dumas 10.1.1740 B.N.Fr. 8982 ff 202-203.

86. Ibid.; also Dupleix to Groiselle 31.8.1739 B.N.Fr. 8982 f 116; 18.1.1740 Ibid f 225V



Dupleix made it quite clear that he was interested in the title only, and in all the marks of distinction attached to it, like the use of a palanquin, the right to carry a flag, and to have kettle drums accompanying his journeys. He did not want a jagir, and he did not consider the whole thing so essential as to be prepared to pay anything to the Emperor.<sup>86</sup> De Volton, suggesting a sizable gift to Delhi, was considered by Dupleix to be suffering from a 'damaged brain'.<sup>87</sup> We do not know how correct Dupleix was in asserting the importance of a mere title in protecting a person or a group in Bengal. It is at least another proof of the great importance he attached to titles and marks of distinction in raising his own status.<sup>88</sup> At the same time he was well advised in rejecting a jagir when we remember that since the days of Murshid Kuli jagirs in Bengal had lost much of their former attractions. The entire jagirdari system of Mughal India, moreover, was under severe strain.<sup>89</sup> He had come quite some way from the days when his main emphasis was on demands for fulfilling terms. But then as now what he wanted most was a solid guarantee to trade privileges, authorised and otherwise, claimed by him for the Company and for individuals favoured by the Company. It would take him almost another decade and changed circumstances in the Decan, to finally make him think in terms of greater involvement and in a different sense, in the Indian system.

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87. Dupleix to Groiselle 12.11.1739 Ibid f. 140

88. Dupleix to his brother 23.11.1737  
B.N.Fr. 8980 f 58V

Dupleix to Directors 23.11.1738. B.N.Fr. 8981 ff 11-20 See also Culture Prosper : Dupleix, ses Plans Politiques; sa Disgrace Paris 1901 pp. 158-160; Martineau op. cit p. 162.

89. Habib Irfan : The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1963 Bombay pp. 269-270 Ray Ratnalekha op. cit. p. 271 ;

## BOOK REVIEWS

Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru A Biography* Volume one : 1889-1947 (Oxford University Press, 1975). Rs. 100.

The Victorian predilection for writing 'Life and Times' (in several tomes) did not really begin with Carlyle's dictum that "History is the biography of great men". The European approach to history had been biographical since the Greeks who explained it in terms of exploits of eponymous heroes, and the contrary influence of Thucydides was undone by Plutarch. The Renaissance individualism reinforced it and the phenomenal Victorian success in industry and empire raised it to a cult. To Lytton Strachey, who was no admirer of Victoria or the eminent Victorians, "historical problems were always, and only, problems of individual behaviour and individual eccentricity." Even as discerning an historian as A. J. P. Taylor could tell us in 1950 that "the history of modern Europe can be written in terms of three titans: Napoleon, Bismarck and Lenin."

A biographical approach, warns Carr, can turn out to be "Good queen Bess and Bad king John" (James would have been more appropriate for comparison) theory of history. He roundly denounces it as "characteristic of the primitive stages of historical consciousness." Great men, he quotes Tolstoy, "are no more than labels giving names to events." But the emphasis on great men as well as their debunking proceed really from confusion of two aspects of man, which can never be separated, man as an individual and man as a member of a group or a class or a nation. A good biography, like Neale's *Queen Elizabeth*, can be a serious contribution to history. Carr himself mentions Deutscher's three volumes on Trotsky. The important thing is that the biographer remembers that his subject does not reside outside history, that, in Gordon Childe's words, he is not a "jack-in-the box who emerges

miraculously from the unknown to interrupt the real continuity of history", and that he is at once a product and an agent of historical forces, sometimes powerful enough to turn them into a different channel or raise them to a higher level.

Professor S. Gopal is more than aware of it in his (likely to be) monumental biography of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first volume of which is under review. He knows that it "is bound to be more than merely the personal biography of a great man", that it will be "almost a history of the last thirty years of the Indian nationalist movement." Jawaharlal Nehru, again, did not simply represent existing forces like many so-called great men of history; he took a prominent part in moulding them towards the creation of a better India and a better world. Internationalism was as much a dimension of Nehru's life as nationalism. He belongs to the great tradition of Tagore, who discovered India, Asia and, in fact, the whole world for us. Yet Gopal remains true to the art of biography in not losing the personality of Nehru in the welter of world forces. The focus is always here on Nehru without, however, bedimming the stage he moved about.

This book has not been "easy to write", admits the author, for Nehru was "the hero of my youth", and he had served Nehru in an official capacity for more than three years. ".....to me his image still glows." Has he, then, been looking at Nehru too closely to get the right perspective? Has he turned an eulogist, a court biographer, albeit an unconscious one?

One should remember the famous story of Marc Bloch in connection with historical objectivity about contemporary events. "In the Languedoc high school", relates Bloch in *The Historians' Craft*, "where I served my first term as a teacher, my good head master issued a warning in a voice befitting a captain of education. 'Here, with the nineteenth century, there is little danger; but when you touch on the religious wars, you must take great care!'" Who consider recent events unsuitable for objective research wish "only to spare Clio's chastity from the profanation of present controversy." Like Bloch, we should reject the idea as it rates the historians' self-control rather low. With considerable academic experience and commendable authorship behind him, and

access to all official and private papers extant, we should grant Professor Gopal the necessary self-control. Only the pseudo-historian reviewer of *The T. L. S.* or the Cambridge historiographer of Indian nationalism can challenge him on this score. Indeed, afraid of his own deep emotions, Gopal has sometimes been over-critical. He has been as dauntless in recounting the life of Nehru as the latter had been in living it.

And Nehru's was a hard life in spite of all the blessing's the good fairy had bestowed at his birth, for it was mostly lived under the British rule. The Prologue paints the setting in a few bold strokes—emergence of an educated Indian elite, failure of Gladstonian liberalism to ally with it, the origin of the Indian National Congress, moderate politics and, finally, moderate despair at British reaction to their demand for modern economy and representative govt. Extremism was gaining ascendancy when Jawaharlal moved from his Indian moorings to Harrow and from Harrow to Cambridge. Gopal calls these years "unformative", for young Nehru never quite fitted 'in or fulfilled his promise while in England. But he was fascinated by Tilak, inspired by Swadeshi movement, elated by Japan's victory over Russia and enthused by Sinn Fein's exploits. "Thimble rigging politics" filled him with such disgust that he dared to accuse Motilal of being "immoderately moderate" and to hope that the latter would be rewarded for his loyalty with a Raibahadurship. This has a striking similarity with the reaction of Sri Aurobindo, lately returned from St. Pauls and Cambridge in the 90's of the nineteenth century, when he called the Congress "un-national" and moderates "place-hunting politicians." No doubt much of Jawahar's enthusiasm was "idealized Chivalric romance", for which he was duly rebuked by the masterful *paterfamilias*. Could it not be the instinctive adolescent urge to defy parental authority?

At Cambridge, however, R. P. Dutt met with an aesthete rather than a rebel. We hear little of the great dons and student contemporaries of Nehru—Marshall and Maitland, Moore and Russell, Whitehead and Strachey. Shaw the crusader impressed him more than Shaw the socialist. He coxed on the Cam, played golf, attended concerts and had a good life, costing his father well over £800 one year. But all this Cyraenic stuff, Gopal says, was "a pose to cover an emptiness in his life." He had no friends, male or

female, and few inspiring ideas. "Jawaharlal had opinions but needed a cause...He accepted the ennui of bourgeois stability for want of any thing more demanding."

Scraping through his Bar exam., he was back home in his father's ambience by 1912. Emotional relations between Nehru *père* and Nehru *filis*, as later between Gandhi and adult Jawararla<sup>1</sup>, should be a fit subject for Erik Erikson. J. Nehru's passive conformism betrays an unformed character. Deep attachment and love of luxury do not explain everything. There was a feminine streak in Nehru which gradually faded away. He wanted to depend on some one stronger than himself. Motilal offered him material and mental strength as Gandhi offered him moral and spiritual. It was only in the thirties that his father's death and disillusionment with Gandhi set him free to attain his own identity.

The reviewer expected a more intimate picture of Nehru's relations with Kamala. But Nehru was not peraps very intimate with her except on occasions and the last year of her short and sweet life. He had no time to be, for Gandhi claimed him soon, and Gandhi could be as demanding a master as Christ. Nehru belonged to a new generation like Kripalani an Shankerlal Banker, Azad and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Patel and Rajendra Prasad, to whom the moderates and exiremists were Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They yearned for a more elevating and effective political style. Gandhi was an outsider, untainted by dull Congress politics of the early war years, which Judith Brown has so aptly called "the politics of limitation." At first sight Gandhi seemed to be "a distant and different and unpolitical" man, a little "starry eyed", but he had the key to the heart of the masses—Hindu and Muslim, in backward provinces and benighted villages. Nehru came into closer touch with the Mahatma during the Amritsar enquiry and opted for his policy of boycott of elections and professions which Motilal endorsed without enthusiasm at Calcutta Congress. "What appealed to the younger-man", explains Gopal, was Gandhi's strength, his rock-like commitment to India's freedom...He was above all a man of action,...with a will to power and a touch of ruthlessness." The characteristic response of Motilal to his son's preference for Gandhian ways was—"you cannot have it both ways: insist on my having no money and yet expect me to pay you money."

Primacy of action offered an escape from ennui. Gopal is, however, critical of Nehru's role as a leader of U. P. kisans during the non-cooperation movement. Harassèd by landlords and fired upon by the police although they appealed first to Government for redress, the kisans of Pertabgarh and Fyzabad turned to the non-cooperators. But Jawaharlal "had at this time no economic ideology to offer, and certainly he had no intent of sending any weapons for these kisans to sustain their revolt." No populist leader, he preached kisan-zamindar unity and agreed with Gandhi that kisans should pay rent. Gopal criticizes his lack of purpose that Mao exhibited in his Hunan report and quotes Fanon with approval to show the universal limitations of nationalist politics. Were Jawaharlal's unformed political ideas ("mixture of anarchism and village government, of Gandhi and Bertrand Russell") responsible alone? Gopal's own analysis, following Peter Reeves', shows the basic cause of failure to be the inner conflicts of a pluralist society. The Muslim landlords and Hindu tenants of Allahabad, the Kurmi tenants of Pertabgarh, led by Baba Ramchandra, and the upper caste landlords faced one another.

After a spell as a no-changer, a faltering championship of Akali cause at Nava and rather successful apprenticeship at administration as chairman of the Allahabad Municipal Board, he came under the influence of international communism at Brussels. Gopal gives us much more information about it than Michael Brecher and suggests it to be a watershed in his life "He who had sailed from India as a dedicated disciple of Gandhi returned a self-conscious revolutionary radical." Gopal hastens to add—"radical in the European tradition." The Independence resolution at Madras Congress, the open rupture with Gandhi over it, the Independence for India League, the hot debate with father over the goal of Dominion Status, the emphasis on the economic content of swaraj at U. P. Provincial Conference (1928)—all these follow Brussels and a short visit to Russia. But Nehru never quite believed in many of the communist methods. He was not sure of how far it would suit India. He would not advise Congress to affiliate itself with the League against Imperialism. He talked of socialization, not nationalization of land. He would accept even much less than socialization at Karachi Congress.

On the other hand, we cannot deny that his days of innocence and over dependence were coming to an end. He was imbibing the Marxist view that imperialism and capitalism worked together, and "the forces opposing (both) should be coordinated so as to strengthen each other. In colonial countries nationalism rightly and automatically took precedence over all other ideologies, but such nationalism should have a broad basis, derive its strength from the masses and work specially for them." He had travelled far from Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and let it be known to Gandhi in unwonted bitter language. Gandhi was hurt and Nehru duly penitent. But the former now began to treat him with a greater tact. He made Nehru tone down the Independence resolution but reduced notice to Britain by one year upon which Nehru agreed to stay away from the final session of Calcutta Congress (1928). Gopal rightly criticizes it as a compromise and as desertion of a trusting comrade, Subhas Bose, who had been fighting strongly for the same cause.

It was of these two leaders of youth that the Government of India was getting anxious. They espied a tendency for political and communist revolutions to join hands. The notes of Haig and Crerar make it amply clear why they wanted to isolate the two forces by striking at the communists through the Meerut trial. From Nehru's prevarications at the trial Mujaffar Ahmed took him to be "a timid reformist". The Comintern utilised his popularity to gain control of the A.I.T.U.C. but warned followers of his bourgeois leanings and accused the League of "fascist tendencies". The shadow of Stalin now fell longer over international communism.

To clip his wings further, Jawaharlal was pitchforked into Congress Presidency by Gandhi. Gopals' comment is apposite—"from the viewpoint of the older leaders, there was a great advantage in having in the chair the malleable founder of the independence movement." Smell of action once again put new life into Nehru. The Dandee march of Gandhi was hailed in romantic terms. He was bent on bringing the Kisans into the civil disobedience movement. Chapter XI—Agrarian Crisis in the United Provinces—is one of the finest and best documented chapters in this book. While the distress of U. P. peasants was genuine, the government, although making a token rent remission

of 2as in the rupee, made none about the arrears and, afraid of increasing Congress influence over rural areas, played up the fear of class war. Gandhi called upon the peasants to pay no less than 8as in case of statutory tenants and 12as in that of occupancy ryots. Non-violence was strictly enjoined. Nehru realised that the terms of settlement agreed upon by Gandhi and Hailey would destroy the potential of the Congress in the countryside. What Gandhi asked tenants to pay was the maximum and Nehru would not like them to pay it if it entailed debt and distress sale. The government in conjunction with talukdars let loose repression. Nehru might have cited this as breach of truce but, realizing that the Working Committee did not share his view on landlordism and was eager to send Gandhi to the Round Table Conference, kept his moderate tone. Gandhi authorized a no-rent campaign but Nehru himself was reluctant to start it without him. The Karachi resolution on Fundamental Rights, passed in March 1931, was milder than that of Lahore. It stipulated no more than a substantial reduction of revenue and rent, a progressive agricultural income tax and inheritance tax. It did not provide for abolition of landlordism or annulment of rural debt. Nehru had now fallen between a wily government, which took advantage of Gandhi's generosity, and the right wing Congress leaders' pro-landlord bias. While certain districts were on the eve of a no rent campaign in December, Hailey, fearing Gandhi's return from London might allow the situation to deteriorate, took action. Nehru was arrested and Hailey now accused him of the ambition to establish a "Leninite directorate." Irwin claimed that he had built a breakwater against agrarian forces unleashed by Nehru by ensuring the loyalty of old, conservative politicians.

So what began with a bang ended in a whimper. It would soon end in tragedy. Motilal's death left a great void (Diary entry of 4 March 1932). Gandhi had been a surrogate for his father. His fast over the Communal Award shook "my little world in which he has such a big place." The next year, however, we find him questioning Gandhi's religious approach to politics, his acceptance of the existing social order the stress on fasts and unaccountable withdrawal of movements, his reliance on reactionary lieutenants. The entry in the Diary of 18 July 1933, a note written about that time and a letter to Gandhi, 13 August 1934, (Gopal, pp. 177-87), pinpoint for us the period of disillusionment. The abandonment of civil disobedience



was bad enough. But the resolution also denounced confiscation and class war as contrary to non-violence and committed Congress to no more than a "wiser and juster use of private property" and "a healthier relationship between capital and labour." The last letter was a *cri de coeur* : "I had a sudden and intense feeling that something broke inside. .." Even Willingdon was touched, but not Gandhi, who considered it to be merely letting off steam. He did not take Nehru's socialist views seriously.

Why he did not break with Gandhi has been explained by the author. He realised that the more important front was the political one and, till the British were expelled, there could be little advance towards socialism. In the struggle with the British, Gandhi's leadership and the Congress organization, however wayward, were still indispensable. Jawaharlal suffered from a complex born of his own superior caste, class and culture which made him feel inadequate as an alternative leader. It was out of character for him to lead a rebellion from within. Gopal challenges Jaiprakash Narain's claim that he had agreed to the formation of the Socialist Party and quotes Sampurnanand to exhibit his "amused contempt" for this "motley crowd of Marxists, Fabians, Gandhians and orthodox Hindus."

The death of Kamala filled the cup of tragedy to overflowing. It is a very moving chapter and the reviewer cannot but congratulate the author for his delicate, almost *sottovoce*, handling of the theme and reproduction in facsimile of a poem Nehru wrote in his Diary in an uncertain hand, apprehensive of the loss to come.

Sad winds where your voice was ;  
Tears, tears where my heart was ;  
And ever with me  
Child, ever with me  
Silence where hope was.

The short dedication of *Autobiography*, "To Kamala who is no more", symbolised the short, unobtrusive, yet in many ways intense, struggle of Kamala to reach out to an immensely more sophisticated and undemonstrative husband who had little time to respond. Gopal's appreciation of *Autobiography* is one of the most perceptive reviews I have read :

"Tortured by doubt, impressive in his indecision, agonizing over all sides of every question, always asking to what end was the long, wearying struggle....", Nehru's way to deal with personal sorrow "is to apply oneself with greater earnestness to the causes for which one has stood."

Nehru was elected President of the Congress in 1936 at Gandhi's instance, for, as in 1929, the latter wanted to moderate the former's views. Nehru found the communists, calling him names since Meerut Trial, in a chastened mood for Popular Front *a la Dimitrov*. Though for widening the Gandhian Congress, Nehru would not give up Gandhian leadership or non-violence, for "groups with most advanced ideology (meaning communists) had functioned largely in the air", while Gandhi had always reached the heart of the masses. He was soon to realise the character of Gandhi's followers in the Working Committee who isolated him, first, over elections under the Act of 1935 and, then, over office-acceptance by the Congress. Gopal explains his failure to force his opinions on the Working Committee as due to his ineradicable belief in democracy—"the core of his socialist attitude—" and compares his role at Lucknow to Blanqui's. Jawaharlal's joint front would consist of right as well as left and he allowed the Working Committee to water down the proposal for affiliation of Peasant and Worker Associations. Lucknow was a triumph of Gandhism over Socialism to Birla's relief: "Jawaharlal's speech in a way was thrown into the wastepaper basket because all the resolutions that were passed were against the spirit of his speech..." Gandhi had still his stranglehold on him: "We have never been so near each other in hearts as perhaps we are today." The three Congress Socialists in the new Working Committee were selected at Gandhi's instance to counter terrorists. The majority were right-wingers. The Indian capitalists were now looking to Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachariar for neutralisation of Nehru. Gandhi went so far as to advise him "not to destroy himself by moving openly into opposition." Gandhi defeated him on the office acceptance issue. The Congress formed ministries in six provinces (later eight). Nehru desperately clung to the illusion that this was only to wreck federation. What a throw-back to Das and his hope to wreck Montagu-Chemsford Reforms from within!

A grave charge against Nehru (and many Congress politicians, except Gandhi) lies in his cavalier attitude to the communal problem.

He hoped that public attention could be diverted from it by emphasis on positive aspects of the national struggle—hunger, poverty and exploitation under British rule. On long term, he thought that Muslim politics, with an upper class base and commitment to collaboration, would learn this priority once the Muslims were asked to elect representatives to the Constituent Assembly on the widest possible franchise but, if necessary, on separate electorates. On the short term, he took Gandhi's line that the Hindus, as a majority community, should make concessions. But Jawaharlal attacked Hindu communalism, no more reactionary or anti-national than Muslim communalism, with greater vehemence. Gopal is rightly critical of this attitude, "based on the belief that the majority community is a privileged one, and the minority community has reason to be communal .. the implication that there was something to choose between Hindu and Muslim communalism was dangerous in its possibilities." At the same time Gopal defends Nehru against Azad's charge that, by reducing one of two portfolios demanded by the League, he wrecked the chances of a Congress-League ministry in U.P. and thereby unleashed Jinnah's vigorous and successful campaign for Pakistan. This is too simplistic an explanation of the resurrection of Jinnah. Jinnah had no use for mass politics. "His idea was to revert to the pre-Gandhian period and to form once more an alliance of elite politicians...." To Nehru, on the other hand, the religious elitism of Jinnah appeared to be medieval and obscurantist. Jinnah called him "the Peter Pan who refused to grow up". Nehru declared that there were Muslims in the Congress "who could provide inspiration to a thousand Jinnahs." The U. P. Congress leaders wanted to open negotiations with the League but both Nehru and Azad warned Pant against any pact. While Jinnah, on his side, would have no more than a united front, Khaliqzaman and Nawab Ismail Khan would accept any terms if they were included in the ministry. Azad was attracted by the possibility of the League ceasing to exist in U. P. and, authorized by W. C. to negotiate, he demanded all League members become full members of the Congress, no League candidates to be set up in by-elections and all to resign on Congress direction. This involved total extinction of League in U. P., including abolition of its Parliamentary Board. Khaliqzaman accepted all but two terms—winding up of the Parliamentary Board and interdiction of by-election on League ticket, for the latter of which he was even prepared to get the consent from the

League Executive. Negotiations broke down when Azad and Nehru insisted on all original conditions. According to Gopal, it was not Nehru's refusal to accept two ministers from the League but the harsh conditions put up by all the Congress negotiators that led to the impasse. It seems from evidence that, barring Khaliqazman and the Nawab, neither party really got down to the reality of the situation and Jinnah wrecked all possibilities by fighting a by-election under the banner of 'Islam in Danger' and with the help of "money and maulanas."

This was the shape of things to come. Jinnah countered Nehru's Muslim mass contact programme (did it ever get off the ground?) through Fascist propaganda and strong arm methods and soon these submerged economic interests in religious zeal.

Some of the Congress ministers behaved strangely. Gopal sheds some amusing light on Rajaji's doings at Madras from Erskine Papers. "...he (Rajaji) is even too much of a Tory for me.. he wishes to go back two thousand (years) and to run India as it was run in the time of king Asoka." K. M. Munshi of Bombay, wrote Maxwell, was "if anything more royalist than the king" in his treatment of leftist leaders "You have already become a police officer", commented Nehru in disgust.

The international scene was no less disgusting. British and French neutrality were taking life out of the spirited resistance of the Spanish people against Franco's Fascist army. After paying homage to Spain, he went to see Czechoslovakia on the eve of the Munich pact. War was coming and the only way Britain could show her bonafides was to eliminate empire from India. It was a great weakness and made England impotent during the Czech crisis. On his part, he saw "the frontiers of our struggle lie not only in our own country but in Spain and China also."

England, however, had no intention to oblige. Communalism was yielding fruit for Jinnah in Bengal and Punjab, so long free from League influence. Congress itself was divided over the policy to be adopted in case war broke out. Gopal's verdict on Subhas Chandra Bose seems to be unduly hostile: "impatient, wilful and endlessly ambitious", "incapable of a wider view, he tended to see most events in relation to his own career", "a dedicated yet egoistic, complicated,

ill-fated being" are some of his comments on Bose. Some of it is no doubt true but Gopal should have gone deeper to explain Bose's impatience with Gandhian politics. Even Nehru, who took Gandhi as his father figure and trembled at the thought of his death, felt like breaking with him more than once. Gandhi could be really exasperating to rational, practical men. Subhas Bose was never emotionally attached to him. He must have inherited from C. R. Das some of his bitterness about Gandhi's stand against Swarajya party and, after Das's death, Gandhi's support for Sengupta must have further alienated him. Firmly rooted in Bengal, Bose could not ignore the force of terrorism. Gandhi's social and economic views left him (as well as Nehru) cold. His compromises with the British in crisis after crisis he could not swallow. He remained firm to the idea of complete independence from 1927 to his death and began to suspect Nehru when, at Calcutta Congress, he absented himself from the open session in deference to Gandhi and Motilal. Gandhi's selection of Nehru as President at Lahore Congress appeared to him to be the old man's clever move to beat down the left opposition to his supermacy. He began to look upon Nehru as a deserter, espacially when the latter signed the Delhi Manifesto against his own conscience and joined other Gandhites to defeat Bose's amendment at Lahore Congress for the formation of a parallel government. His prompt formation of a Congress Democratic Party in 1930 anticipated that of Forward Block a decade later. Gandhi's pact with Irwin, joining the Round Table Conference, fast over Communal Award and, finally, suspension of civil disobedience movement only confirmed his view that Gandhi had failed as a political leader. His contacts with Mussolini and Nazi leaders (but not Hitler) roused suspicion in the minds of the nationalists; socialists and communists alike. His ten point programme for Samyavadi Sangha and talk of "synthesis between communism and fascism" were dangerously vague, while his insistence on dictatorship of the party sounded ominous in 1939. He hurt the Old Guard by imputing to them an intention to compromise with the British on federation.

Tripuri crisis arose not so much over a clash of ideology as over a clash of temperament and chiefly over Bose's defiance of Gandhi's authority. What Gandhi feared was that Bose's impetuous militancy would precepitate a premature civil disobedience.

Nehru feared it would hinder a united anti-imperialist front ; "it would have been set a back for the real left." Patel and other rightist leaders, who had been in no mood to brook Nehru's socialist stance in 1936 (and resigned only to retract at Gandhi's instance), were far less in a mood to swallow Bose's hectoring tone and unfounded allegation in 1939. They resigned en masse to force the issue. Nehru resigned separately and tried to mediate. But the rightists really wanted a sectarian homogeneity under Gandhi's supreme command. Pant's resolution to that effect was carried at Tripuri while a desperately ill Subhas was unable to parry what was really a censure motion without the help of Nehru and the Congress socialists. Bose resigned. In the weeks following Tripuri Nehru vainly tried to heal the breach. "... you should accept Subhas as President", he wrote to Mahatma on 17th April. "To try to push him out seems to me to be an exceedingly wrong step." Bose appealed to Gandhi on 20th. The latter advised him to form a Working Committee of his own or consult the Old Guard. Nehru advised him to withdraw resignation and reappoint the old Working Committee. Both would have been humiliating for Bose. He might have fought back had Nehru agreed to serve in his Working Committee. But since Nehru won't, the crisis could not be resolved. "Even his (Nehru's) neutrality would have probably given us a majority", he wrote to his nephew in distress.

"Bose had really destroyed himself" is the conclusion of the author. "In Gandhian India leadership could come only by gift, never by seizure." As for Nehru's conduct, Gopal justifies it at length (pp. 243-44) on the plea of primacy of international and national political situation in Nehru's eyes and the essential necessity of a united front. The left forces were not yet strong. The party needed Gandhi at the helm. The reviewer is not wholly impressed. The combination of Bose and Nehru might have brought sense to the Old Guard and Gandhi might have been mollified, especially if Bose drew in his horns of ultra-militancy for the time being. But I agree with Gopal in absolving Nehru of the charge of remaining happy on the inside track, while allowing his only rival to be pushed off the course.

With the outbreak of war we move into a much more well-documented period. Besides Mansergh and Lumby's monumental *The Transfer of Power* and Penderell Moon's *Wavell: The Viceroy's*

*Journal*, Gopal has consulted not only the private papers of Nehru but those of Linlithgow, Cripps, Alexander, Attlee and Caroe and given us snippets from his personal interviews with some of the dramatis personae of the day, like the Earl of Mountbatten.

It will no doubt remain the last word on the last years of the Rāj for some time to come. But the lengthening shadow of an inexorable tragedy casts its gloom on it. The three Viceroys—Linlithgow, Wavell and Mountbatten—all play a crucial role in this drama. The first, “heavy of body and slow of mind”, was far from “the Viceroy at bay”. He revamped Jinnah into a position equal to that of Gandhi and the League to that of the Congress. His “August offer” to take a few representative Indians into his Executive Council and form a War Advisory Council was accompanied by a secret directive to crush the Congress organization as a whole.

The Cripps Mission gets a full chapter. Cripps hoped too much from his earlier personal contact with Nehru which the latter was in no position to give, and Nehru was soon to be alienated by Cripps’ “take it or leave it” attitude. Gandhi opposed the declaration for entertaining the idea of Pakistan while, happy over the same, Jinnah made no difficulties over interim arrangements. Rajaji was for setting aside Gandhi and accepting it, provincial option and all. Azad insisted on effective control of defence by an Indian National Government and the Congress went far to dilute the powers of the Defence Member vis-a-vis the C-in-C. But the Viceroy prevented it. Another bone of contention was the status of the Executive Council. Was it to be treated as a Cabinet or not? In his letter to Churchill, 4 April 1942, Cripps was thinking in terms of the former and he must have given an assurance to Azad of this nature. The Viceroy put his foot down on it. The mediation of Johnson made matters worse. Churchill and the War Cabinet backed Linlithgow rather than Cripps. The worst part of it was that an irate Cripps tried to hide his disappointment under a false accusation that the defence question had been satisfactorily settled but Azad and Nehru broke the parley on the question of national government at Gandhi’s directive.

The ultimatum which Subhas Bose had wanted to deliver in 1939 was delivered by Gandhi in the Quit India movement of August 1942. Why did Gandhi think it to be premature at the

earlier date and appropriate at the latter? If he was emboldened by the Japanese sweep over South East Asia and Burma, he must have misread the British psychology. It was their finest hour. On the other hand, the Indian people were unprepared for any but sporadic violence. Disgust with Cripps and mounting British repression blinded Gandhi to the design of Japanese imperialism. Gandhi's point was, since the British were unable to defend India and unfree Indians were too passive to help the war effort, a British withdrawal was the only way to rouse Indian ardour. More, building of resistance to the British might be used for resistance against the Japanese. Nehru opposed it as far as possible but was actually coerced by Gandhi who threatened to lead a movement out side the Congress.

It is interesting to learn that Nehru would have been satisfied with Dominion Status on Chinese-American guarantee and would have supported Azad if he started negotiations on interim arrangements on the basis of Cripps proposals with Roosevelt as arbiter. This was not to be. Gandhi was very angry with Azad and the War Cabinet had already decided to strike. The rest of the war was silence within prison walls.

Jinnah's stature had, meanwhile, been further inflated by Linlithgow. The C.P.I. was supporting the idea of Pakistan. They did not interpret the League's growing influence as reflection of Muslim backwardness but regarded the communal problem as one of multi-national consciousness, coming to life "with the further course of bourgeois development". Adhikari discovered a democratic core in the demand. Wavell turned out to be a total partisan of the League. While the Congress accepted parity between caste Hindus and Muslims, Wavell demanded parity between Congress and League for the formation of the Interim Government. He went back on his word to Gandhi (24 June 1945) and agreed not to select a Muslim belonging to the Congress. This was treating the Congress as a communal body! Prompted by Jinnah, he dissolved the Simla Conference midway, when the Congress offered to join.

Such august backing and assiduous nursing of separate electorates during war years ended in a windfall victory of the League in the crucial elections at the end of 1945. "Communists who have



joined the Muslim League", ruefully commented Nehru, in a letter to R. P. Dutt, "appear to be more rabid Leaguers than others". Except in N.W.F.P. the League swept almost all the reserved seats, and at the centre-all. Nehru followed an ostrich-like policy, ignoring the pole-results, hoping the Muslim majority areas won't secede or, if they did at all, would quickly retract their absurd decision. Jinnah probably used the slogan of Pakistan to secure a leverage against the Congress but his followers, eager for power and prospect of a state of their own, won't let him cry halt. By the spring of 1946 the Congress was reconciled to the principle of secession. From now on negotiations were continuation of civil war by other means. The Congress cannot be absolved and Nehru must share the blame for playing the role of a helpless onlooker.

The Cabinet Mission has a chapter of its own. Jinnah's attitude was very well summed up by Alexander in his diary of 16 April 1946 (p. 314) as "first making large demands and secondly insisting that he should make no offer reducing that demand but should wait for the other side always to say how much they would advance towards granting that demand". To Nehru independence could be the only basis of discussion and the final authority to decide on Constitution was to be the Constituent Assembly. To placate Muslim opinion he thought of creation of four new provinces out of Muslim majority areas. The Congress objected to compulsory grouping as this would hand over Congress provinces like Assam and N.W.F.P. to the League. A strong centre was demanded. Since no agreement could be reached, the Cabinet Mission issued its own plan on 16 May rejecting partition, dropping the idea of parity at the centre, giving provinces freedom to form groups and decide provincial subjects to be taken in common. The interim govt. was to be fully Indian. But the Constituent Assembly was to be in three sections which would meet separately for deciding provincial constitutions for their group and, if desired, a group constitution, the provinces having option to come out of a group after fresh general elections under the new constitution. It was a compromise with a big contradiction—grouping of provinces were optional but meeting of the Constituent Assembly by sections was compulsory. Since the Mission conceded to the League that decisions in the sections should be by majority votes, N.W.F.P. in Sec B and Assam in Sec C would always be in a minority.

Was this a recommendation or mandatory? Gandhi, Azad and Nehru thought that the Constituent Assembly was to be a sovereign body and might modify the plan. Pethick Lawrence replied that sovereignty of the Constituent Assembly would be limited by the plan. As for the interim government, Wavell said he would rather resign than act as a figurehead. 14 names were announced: 6 Congress Hindus (with 1 scheduled caste), 5 from Muslim League and 3 minority representatives. On groupings and sections Wavell told one thing to Azad, another to Jinnah and categorically told Gandhi that grouping was not essential. The Mission, however, rejected Congress demand to include 1 Muslim from its quota of 6. Alexander and Wavell vetoed Pethick Lawrence on this point, Wavell even proposing to treat the scheduled caste as a minority group. Thus the Congress was to choose only from Caste Hindus and the old Caste-Hindu—Muslim parity came back by the backdoor. The Congress rejected interim govt. but accepted the long term plan, believing that grouping was not to be compulsory and the Constituent Assembly was to settle its own procedure.

Gopal denies the allegation that Gandhi chose Nehru rather than Patel as Congress President in 1946 to manoeuvre the former into premiership. He also denies Azad's charge that Nehru irresponsibly destroyed the chance of a settlement by declaring that the Congress was bound by no other condition than joining the Constituent Assembly. Interpreting it to imply that the Constituent Assembly would upset essential details like grouping, Jinnah withdrew acceptance of the plan. Though Ispahani says that he was never happy with it, Nehru should not have given a wily politician like him any opening. In fact, both Congress and League had reservations and Wavell's double-dealing only strengthened their doubts about each other's intentions. \*

Jinnah struck with the great Calcutta killing when the British government was on the point of calling his bluff and going it with the Congress alone. While the obvious answer would have been to dismiss Suhrawardi ministry (Cripps promised it to Patel), Wavell returned to the policy of appeasing Jinnah. "What is the good of our forming the Interim Government of India", wailed Nehru, "if all that we can do is to helplessly watch and do nothing else

when thousands of people are being butchered and subjected to infinitely worse treatment?" (Nehru to Wavell, 5 October, 1946).

In N.W.P. British officials, led by Caroe, set themselves to destroy the popularity of the Congress and establish League control. The Congress rule in that province was, in Lord Ismay's phrase, "a bastard situation" which had to be remedied. Frantic efforts were being made to bring the League into the Interim Government. Wavell even threatened to dismiss the Government if the Congress insisted on taking in a nationalist Muslim. Ultimately the League joined but without any commitment to the plan or renunciation of direct action. Jinnah sent second rank lieutenants obviously to disrupt the Government. Wavell would have taken away Home from Patel had not the Congress side threatened to resign *en masse*.

Openly allied with the League, Wavell continued postponing the Constituent Assembly. The London talks of December, 1946 strengthened Jinnah's hands by ensueing decisions by simple majority vote in sections. When an exasperated Nehru was on the brink of tendering resignation, Attlee's Government dismissed Wavell.

Since the date of withdrawal of the British had been announced to be no later than June 1948, Mountbatten came to wind up the Raj. No one has contributed so much to the Mountbatten myth as Mountbatten himself. Lapierre and Collins have made him the central focus of Indian history during the transfer of power. Gopal has served the cause of truth by demolishing the myth of a Prince Charming who "helped to solve the Indian question by bemusing those concerned into accepting his solution." Since March 1947 the Congress Working Committee had reconciled itself to the partition of Punjab and Bengal. Gandhi's role in all this Gopal aptly compares with that of "the head of an Oxbridge college who is greatly revered but has little influence on the governing body." The interim government was unworkable. Psychological tensions among Hindus and Muslims could not be resolved by reason or force. The best solution was to part ways, hoping the logic of

defence would lead one day to reintegration of India. "We have often to go through the valley of shadows," wrote Nehru to Cariappa, "before we reach the sun-lit mountain tops." (29 April 1947). It was a counsel of despair. In Ismay's view, Nehru was washed out, mentally and physically, and left to Mountbatten full scope to work out the partition.

The story of the Plan Balkan has been related by Mountbatten himself in his second and third Nehru Memorial lectures (1968/70). Gopal denies Tinker's conclusion that the response of Nehru reflected an internal crisis in the mind of an emotional dreamer. Nehru so implicitly believed in Mountbatten that he imputed the obnoxious aspects of the plan to London. His outright rejection saved the hasty Viceroy from a *faux pas*. The modified plan contained certain unacceptable things like referendum in N.W.F.P. and Sylhet. But the riots in Lahore and Calcutta made transfer of power on any conditions seemed justified. Catching Nehru in such a mood, Mountbatten not only induced him to accept referendum but dominion status for two Governments along with a division of the armed forces.

Should the Congress have accepted? Should it have gone into wilderness as Gandhiji invited it to? The answer lies in the lap of gods. The Congress ministers, including Nehru, were mortal men at the end of their tether. With India in flames and Mountbatten prodding all the time for quick decisions on weighty problems, cool analysis and far-sighted decisions were impossible to arrive at. While Gandhiji's solution was Noakhali, Nehru's solution was South Block. One believed in long-term healing through spiritual power while the other believed in immediate suppression of brutality with the full powers of the state. That Nehru did not want power for its own sake, that he did not merely wish to put down flames but to build a new India out of its ashes, has been amply and beautifully attested to in this book. At the same time, the author has not been able to forget a lone, pathetic, but sublime, figure, fasting at Calcutta to expiate the sins of the right wing which wanted power at any costs and the left which lacked the nerve and the will power to start a new mass liberation movement.

Winding his wary way through a vast mass of records, Professor Gopal has produced the most scrupulous yet vibrant account of a man who played such a significant role in Indian history. More sensitive than Brecher, he can be especially congratulated for a style which is English in elegant subtlety while remaining Indian in philosophical response to the tragedy unfolding with the achievement.

AMALES TRIPATHI

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*EDITED BY*  
**AMALES TRIPATHI**



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## GANDHI'S SECOND RISE TO POWER

*Indian Politics—1924 to 1929\**

AMALES TRIPATHI

( 4 )

Reading took a dim view of Gandhi after he was released early in 1924. "... Gandhi still retains a hold over the people as a religious ascetic, a preacher of high ideals and a saintly life. He has his advantage over Das and Nehru, who have been making attempts to bring Gandhi in with them and thus to enable them to present a united front at Congress. Gandhi began by resisting the attempt and showed fight, but unseccessfully, partly because Das and Nehru had gained an ascendancy over the public, and partly because Gandhi is in weak health and unable to conduct an active campaign; and also because Gandhi realised that he could not re-galvanise the public into following him completely he has now surrendered to the Das-Nehru party in Congress . . ." Thus did Reading sum up the position in November 1924<sup>1</sup>.

But this was appearance rather than the reality. For a *satyagrahi* there could be a retreat but no rout. He would remain invincible, for, as Bondurant says, his "objective is not to assert propostions but to create possibilities". As late as 1927 Gandhi was upholding the two decisions for which he was being criticised most—viz. Bardoli and Khilafat. "I have faith enough in my method to be able to prophesy that posterity will consider the years 1920 and 1921 as among the most brilliant in the pages of India's history, and among them the Bardoli 'somersault' the most brilliant of all. The Bardoli decision has enabled India to look the world square in the face and hold up her head. With her creed in the Congress constitution it was the only correct, bold and honourable course for the nation to take. The battle for Swaraj was no camouflage". In spite of the encircling

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\*continued from the last issue,

gloom of Hindu-Muslim distrust and the gore of frequent riots, for which many accused his unwise combination of a national movement for Swaraj with an extra-national movement like Khilafat,<sup>2</sup> he held, "The participation in the Khilafat agitation has made both the parties strong and has resulted in a mass awakening which would have otherwise taken ages . . . . What we see happening today is nothing but the coming of dirt to the surface in the process of purification. This froth in the shape of feuds has come to the surface only to be thrown out in the end".<sup>3</sup> He still held firmly to the belief he had formed as early as *Hind Swaraj* (1908) that imperialism was the predatory child of western materialism, and it was to save her soul that India must fight both. This idea was not original. Many of the nineteenth century European artists, poets and critics and, of course, the anarchists, had been 'outsiders'. It filled Bengal's air in the post-partition Swadeshi days and was given vivid expression by Aurobindo himself.<sup>4</sup> Gandhi also held that the Council was a *maya* of this imperialism, which the Swarajists should better renounce for constructive work among the masses. Again, not original. Such things have been said during the Swadeshi days by Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi genuinely felt that the balm of unbounded love and unilateral trust would heal the cancer of communalism. He could not care less for the Swarajist gimmicks of throwing out of Finance Bills and passing of national demands. The 'corridors of power' did not interest him. Once again, he was beginning from the periphery—the rural millions and the untouchables. The Governor General and the Secretary of State, with their eyes riveted on Delhi or Simla, missed this little man in loincloth whose charkha symbolised the greatest power in India—the power to touch the heart of the common people whom the alien government and the elitist Congress politicians had always left cold. In the earth lay the strength of Anteus.

The paramount need in 1924 was to gather the scattered strands of unity—the pro-changers and the no-changers, the Hindus and the

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1 Reading to Birkenhead, 20 Nov. 1924, Birkenhead Coll., op. cit.

2 Sampurnand to Gandhi, 2 June 1924, photostat, S. N. 10354.

3 *Young India*, 15 Dec. 1927.

4 Amal Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (Calcutta 1967), pp. 29-30, p. 116, p. 123, p. 146.

5 Ibid., pp. 112-13. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Swadeshi Samaj' (*Probasi*, Asarh 1315 B.S.), 'Sadupaya' (ibid, Sravan 1315 B.S.).

Muslims, the caste Hindus and the untouchables, the rich town-dwellers and the rural peasantry. At first Gandhi was firmly for reiterating the Bardoli programme and opposing Council-entry.<sup>6</sup> He viewed the latter to be tantamount to participating in the present system which he had unequivocally dubbed as 'satanic'. Obstructionism, again, implied a strong sense of violence. The formation of the Swaraj party was a premature step. It disregarded the constructive programme, abandoned the Khilafat and Punjab issues and retarded the progress towards Swaraj. It was at best "a necessary evil", "a settled fact", in view of Delhi and Cocanada resolutions.<sup>7</sup> Motilal Nehru reacted strongly to such views,<sup>8</sup> and Das requested Gandhi not to upset the Delhi compromise before a joint deliberation.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi had a week-long talk with them and still failed to see eye to eye. "But I recognise", he told the Press, "that, so long as they think otherwise, their place is undoubtedly in the Councils". He would be no party to putting any obstacles in their way or to carrying any propaganda against them. He would request them to uphold the constructive programme while in Council and, if the government refused to enforce such of their resolutions, to insist on dissolution. Failing this, again, they should resign and prepare for civil disobedience. The pro-changers differed on Gandhi's strict interpretation of non-cooperation but agreed to abjure the Council politics if bureaucracy turned obdurate.<sup>10</sup>

The four resolutions Gandhi moved at A.I.C.C. meeting, Ahmedabad, at the end of June 1924 were his terms for accepting leadership. One insisted that all members of the elected Congress organizations should send in 2000 yards of self-spun yarn every month. A penalty clause was attached to it by which any default in this behalf would automatically create a vacancy in the position of the defaulter. When this was being discussed, a number of members walked out to mark their disapproval. Another resolution, regretting the murder of Earnest Day by Gopinath Saha, roused bitter controversy. Das did not like Gandhi's strong words deprecating terroristic violence, for he had to rely on the terrorists in the peculiar political situation in

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6 Gandhi to Mohammed Ali, 7 Feb. 1924

7 Draft statement on Council questions, 11 April 1924, C.W., vol. 23, pp. 414-18.

8 App XIVa, *ibid.*, pp. 570-76.

9 C. R. Das to Gandhi, 18 April 1924, *ibid.*, p. 576.

10 Statement to Associated Press of India, 22 May 1924.

Bengal. He had been a party to applauding Saha at Serajgunj session of the Bengal Provincial Conference. Gandhi won on all the four resolutions due to large walk-outs, but he considered himself to be morally defeated. He rescinded the penalty clause, modified the resolution on boycott and wept on the walk-out of Das and Nehru on Gopinath Saha resolution. He felt doubts about accepting the presidency of the Congress at Belgaum. "As representing a stubborn minority", he wrote to Shaikat Ali, "it is possible to do a lot".<sup>11</sup> He was "prepared to facilitate your securing the Congress machinery",<sup>12</sup> he assured Nehru, and was unwilling to get into a battle for power or to be mixed up with the Council programme.<sup>13</sup>

Up to the middle of August Gandhi remained unrelenting. He even talked of going out of the Congress to set up a separate organization. The Ali brothers were trying to reintroduce the penalty clause, passed but rescinded at Ahmedabad. When Motilal suggested a compromise, Gandhi laid down certain terms, like (a) reiteration of the five boycotts but suspension of all but the boycott of foreign cloth, (b) the Congress as such to have nothing to do with the Councils but the Swarajists to have the right to enter them independently, (c) confinement of constructive activity to Khadi, Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability, and, finally, (d) Khadi franchise for the Congress members. Gandhi insisted on the last.<sup>14</sup> What better terms could he expect from the Swarajists, he asked his followers, when "they (the Swarajists) do represent a large section of people who want petty relief"<sup>15</sup> as also the intellect of the country and when "the mutual bickerings have assumed such large proportions that we must give up for the time being any idea of large scale Satyagraha"?

The Bengal Ordinance of October and deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations hastened this process of moderation. Any doctrinaire stand on Khadi would have lost Gandhi the support of Bengal whose youth were being repressed on a large scale. The growing communal tension precluded non-cooperation. "There is no alternative", he told his own followers (the no-changers), "but to retreat to the point where I have arrived . . . it would be a crime to carry on

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11. Gandhi to Shaikat Ali, 27 July 1924.

12. Gandhi to M. Nehru, 9 Aug. 1924, C.W., vol. 24, p. 536.

13. Same to same, 15 Aug. 1924, photostat S.N. 10117.

14. Same to same, 30 Aug. 1924, photostat S.N. 10140.

15. Gandhi to Rajagopalachari, 15 Sept. 1924, C.W., vol. 25, p. 149.

non-cooperation on a national scale in an atmosphere of violence".<sup>16</sup> He would be content if the Swarajists accepted the diluted spinning franchise,<sup>17</sup> and carried on their work in the Councils on behalf of the Congress and as an integral part of the Congress.

He entered into what is known as the Calcutta Pact with the Swarajists and got it accepted at Belgaum. The charkha and the Council were to coexist. "The Congress belongs equally", said Gandhi, "to the pro-changers and no-changers". The charkha was to be the symbol of their new-found unity, and even more, the symbol of the elitist commitment to the cause of India's poor millions and the Satyagrahis' weapon against the immoral trade of Lancashire. "The fruition of the boycott of foreign cloth through hand-spinning and Khaddar is calculated not only to bring about a political result of first magnitude, it is calculated also to make the poorest of India . . . conscious of their strength and make them partakers in the struggle for India's freedom".<sup>18</sup>

"Gandhi is now attached to the tail of Das and Nehru", comments Reading on Belgaum Congress. "It is pathetic to observe the rapid decline in the power of Gandhi and the frantic attempts he is now making to cling to his position as leader at the expense of practically every principle he has hitherto advocated". The Belgaum Congress had arrived at another patched up compromise, which no body believed in. "It appears to me that Gandhi was allowed to have his last throw for khaddar and that the franchise based on spinning was accepted in a modified form by Das and Nehru and others with their tongues in their cheeks and the knowledge that it was utterly futile".<sup>19</sup> While Gandhi was intending to use charkha as a lever for mass upheaval against British rule, which would *inter alia* offer supplementary occupation to the peasantry and an organizational base for the middle class leaders, the Viceroy ridiculed it as a fad.

Gandhi cast the net of unity wider to catch the Liberals who need not have any objection now that non-cooperation had been suspended. The Liberals always rose to the cry of 'liberty in danger', and here

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16 Discussion of 7 Nov. 1924, *Navajiban*, 16 Nov. 1924.

17 This was no loop-hole for giving up spinning, he explained at the Subjects Committee, Belgaum. C.W., vol. 25, pp. 454-55.

18 Gandhi's presidential address at Belgaum, *ibid.*, pp. 471-89.

19 Reading to Birkhenhead, 1 Jan. 1925, *op. cit.*



was the Government destroying it by the Bengal Ordinance! But Sapru would not join. The Ordinance might be far too sweeping in character, said he, "but I am not at all satisfied that the object of the Governor General is to suppress constitutional agitation".<sup>20</sup> G. A. Natesan defended the Ordinance against anarchism.<sup>21</sup> Srinivasa Sastri listed the difficulties of the Liberals in joining—"altered Congress creed, Swarajist party's supremacy in Congress politics, suspension without abandonment of non-cooperation and civil disobedience . . . Khaddar uniform, yarn franchise".<sup>22</sup>

At the All Party Conference, Bombay (21 November), Gandhi moved for the withdrawal of the Ordinance as well as Bengal Regulation III of 1818 and for speedy establishment of Swaraj. The Conference appointed a committee to consider the best way of reuniting all parties in the Congress and prepare a scheme of Swaraj including the solution of the communal problem. In January 1925 a sub-committee of the Conference endorsed the draft Commonwealth of India Bill, prepared earlier by Sapru and Besant, with a few modifications. In the final version, given by the April session of the Conference, the goal laid down was to be dominion status without reservations regarding defence and foreign affairs. Other features included abolition of the India Council, reduction of the status of the Secretary of State to that of the Secretary for Colonies, a Cabinet system at the centre and provinces, a federal constitution with residuary powers for the Centre and abolition of communal and special representation. These, therefore, were Gandhi's minimum demands at the beginning of 1925.

Before the Conference could meet in April, the last problem—Hindu-Muslim unity—had become more intractable. "Interested persons", wrote Gandhi, "who were disappointed during the palmy days of non-cooperation, now that it has lost the charm of novelty,

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20 T. B. Sapru to Gandhi, 16 Nov 1924, photostat, S.N. 11730 Das persuaded Gandhi that the Ordinance was meant to suppress the Swarajist opposition in Council. It was not wholly true. The Congress organization in Bengal was so much infiltrated by the terrorists or ex-terrorists that it was difficult to choose. The Ordinance was applied indiscriminately by a harassed police who cared little for subtle differences. See Home Pol. 379/1924.

21 G. A. Natesan to Gandhi, 18 Nov. 1924, photostat, S.N. 11732.

22 S. Sastri to Secy., Servants of India Society, 18 Nov., 1924, tel., photostat S.N. 11734.

have found their opportunity and are trading upon the religious bigotry or the selfishness of both the communities. The result is written in the history of the feuds of the past two years. Religion has been travestied. Trifles have been dignified by the name of religious tenets which, the fanatics claim, must be observed at any cost. Economic and political causes have been brought into play for the sake of fomenting trouble". To this tragedy the callous indifference of the local authority had considerably contributed as at Kohat. What was the solution? "Our goal", replied Gandhi, "must be removal at the earliest possible moment, of communal or sectional representation. A common electorate must impartially elect its representatives on the sole ground of merit. Our services must be likewise impartially manned by the most qualified men and women ... But till that time comes and communal jealousies or preferences become a thing of the past (here Gandhi differs from the Extremists of the Swadeshi days), minorities who suspect the motives of majorities must be allowed their way. The majority must set the example of self-sacrifice".<sup>23</sup> In Kohat, for instance, the onus lay on the Mussalmans, who were in a majority. In Allahabad or Calcutta it would lie on the Hindus.

But there was the rub. What exactly happened at Kohat? Gandhi and Shaukat Ali would not agree about it even after an on-the-spot enquiry. "I am prepared", wrote Gandhi to Shaukat, "to strongly condemn the publication of the poem<sup>24</sup> but I am unable to condone the looting and arson. I do not endorse your opinion that the pamphlet was the cause of the conflagration. The ground was already prepared. I cannot treat the conversion as lightly as you seem to do. In my opinion the Khilafatists have grossly neglected their duty and Maulana Ahmad certainly betrayed the trust reposed in him".<sup>25</sup> He differed from Fazl-i-Hussain on the question of granting separate electorate to the Muslims, which would certainly be claimed by other communities and, ultimately, by sub-sects. "This must mean ruin of nationalism".<sup>26</sup> Mohammed Ali espied in this

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23 Presidential address, Belgaum Congress, op. cit.

24 Gandhi is referring to the poem which starts with 'Banayenge Kabame Vishnuka Mandir' (we shall build a temple for Vishnu at Kaba), which wounded the religious susceptibles of the Muslims at Kohat.

25. Gandhi to Shaukat Ali, 23 Feb. 1925, photostat, S.N. 10524.

26 Gandhi to Fazl-i-Hussain, 2 March 1925 (from Mahadev Desai's Diary).

Malaviya's evil influence on Gandhi. Malaviya, he wrote to Jawaharlal, was "out to defeat Gandhism and to become the leader of the Hindus only since he could not be the leader of Muslims as well as Hindus".<sup>27</sup> How far had Gandhi moved away from his erstwhile friends, the Ali brothers!

His relations with the Swarajists were not improving either. His generous gestures to them following C. R. Das's death met with little response. Because of their hostility to the spinning franchise, already diluted, Gandhi offered to resign at the Working Committee meeting at Calcutta (15 July 1925), but was requested to continue. Birkenhead's 7 July speech effected a union of ranks for the time being. Gandhi absolved the Swarajya Party from the Calcutta Pact and associated himself with its resolutions threatening to obstruct work in the Councils. Clause B of the resolution of Patna A.I.C.C. (22 September) declared the Congress to be a political body again and delivered the Congress to the Council Party.<sup>28</sup> His followers complained. Sitaramayya's comments (long after the event) are interesting—"The equities of Belgaum were set at nought at Patna, for at Patna, the Council wing took the whole prestige of the Congress and took away the spinning franchise as well".<sup>29</sup> Reading's comments are no less revealing: "It is now pathetic to watch his (Gandhi's) puerile manoeuvres to remain attached to the car of the Congress, even though it is entirely in the hands of the Swarajists, and his advocating procedure and principles quite different from those associated with his own name. His spinning franchise—always of course ridiculous—has been again buffeted in the Congress till almost nothing remains of it except a name, and the old Congress franchise of a contribution of four annas has been restored, which has this significance only that it is a crushing of the heel on Gandhi's view".<sup>30</sup> Gandhi's self-defence was rather lame. "My part in the Patna resolution", he explained to Ansari, "was a matter of necessity and not of choice—necessity in the sense that I recognize the democratic character of the Congress. And knowing that I could not convince the Swarajists of the error of Council-entry and knowing also that my best friends and

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27 Md. Ali to J. Nehru, 15 June 1924, J. Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, p. 37.

28 P. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-89.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 290.

30 Reading to Birkenhead, 1 Oct. 1925, Birkenhead Coll., *op. cit.*

co-workers had become Swarajists, I took it that I could not do less than throw my weight with them as against other political parties".<sup>31</sup>

An over-conscientious man like Gandhi could not, however, really accept such a compromise. He voluntarily retired from politics for a year, as he told Ansari, because he was "sick unto death over the unreality and untruth that surrounds us at the present moment . . ." The squabbles among the Swarajists and between the Swarajists and his own followers, bitter feelings between Hindus and Muslims, misunderstanding with trusted friends like the Alis, a constitutional revulsion from Council-entry, all these factors took away his appetite for active politics. His retirement was not an eclipse as Reading and Irwin fondly believed it to be,<sup>32</sup> however, but a withdrawal like that of the Pandavas before the great Kurukshetra War. It was a withdrawal in the Toynbeeian sense, for return to action on a new and higher plane. "The return is the essence of the whole movement as well as its final cause."

Throughout the best part of 1926 Gandhi was involved in "khadi and untouchability and the unpopular method of protecting the cow." His forum was the All India Spinners' Association and not the Indian National Congress, although he attended it. Motilal considered Gandhi's retirement inopportune. On communal tension, he wrote to Jawaharlal, "My voice will be a cry in the wilderness. I shall consult Gandhi, but as you know his hobbies do not interest me beyond a certain point."<sup>33</sup> J. M. Sengupta begged Gandhi to come to riot-torn Calcutta. He would not come. Even Shraddhanand's gruesome murder at the end of the year failed to draw him out. "Guilty, indeed," he said at Gauhati Congress, "are all those who excited feelings of hatred against one another." Amicable settlement between the two communities would come only when they were tired of fighting.

Did Gandhi's year-long aloofness prove costly in the long run? But how could one be so sure of his success in the context of what had been happening throughout 1924-26, at the end of which came the murder of Shraddhanand? "The speeches at the Tabligh Conference," reports the Chief Secretary of Bombay, "not only hurt the Hindu feelings but constituted in a way a challenge to them to

31/ Gandhi to Ansari, 26 Nov. 1925, photostat, S.N. 10668.

32 Irwin to Birkenhead, 16 June 1925, Halifax Coll., vol. II, p. 36.

33 Motilal Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 2 Dec 1926.

promote Suddhi." Criticism of Islam in the Hindu press, Punjab Government reports, helped the Tabligh. The Hindu Mahasabha would not accept the apology of the League for Shraddhananda's murder. Memorial meetings preached Hindu nationalism. Moonje, in his presidential address (1927), attacked "the dual domination of British machine gun and the Moslem lathi."

Gandhi imputed all this to a consciousness of weakness in both parties. "Hindus feel their weakness in physical strength and endurance. Mussalmans feel their weakness in education and earthly possessions." Weakness bred fear and fear distrust. Would this weakness be cured or the mutual distrust dissipated by any clever electoral arrangement? Would not the Government offer better things, as Irwin did at Poona (28 July 1926) and the League promptly accepted at Delhi (29 December 1926)? Gandhi believed in a change of heart, never in constitutional or legal devices, so dear to lawyer leaders of the Congress and the League.<sup>34</sup> "It was possible for them (Hindus and Moslems) to have avoided this if they could have assimilated the programme of 1920."<sup>35</sup> This, indeed, gives away the solution to which Gandhi was groping at this moment. If he could start another mass movement, like that of 1920, then, perhaps, all trivial issues would be forgotten, all petty bickerings subside, and the Hindus and the Mussalmans, both poor, would make a common cause for Swaraj because it now meant for them bread and employment. The solution of the political as well as the communal problems lay in the same struggle, and for that he was preparing in prayerful silence, far from the madding crowd or Council politics.

"The Swarajists are down. The Hindu-Muslim dissensions have destroyed Gandhi's dream"—thus did Birkenhead exult at the beginning of 1927.<sup>36</sup> Actually things were not so bad. Gauhati Congress (1926) refused to accept ministry and resolved to oppose its formation by other parties until political prisoners were released, repressive laws were repealed and Dominion Status was conceded. These were the

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34 "The Hindu-Muslim Unity" resolution of A.I.C.C., Bombay (15-16 May 1927) left him cold, as its ratification rested on a foreign power. If there were no wise arbitrators or we were too unruly to unite, "let us fight till we are exhausted and come to our senses" *Young India*, 16 June 1927. Also 'The Goose and the Gander', *ibid.*, 14 July 1927.

35 Gandhi to Norman Leys, 3 Sept. 1926, photostat, S.N. 12171.

36 Birkenhead to Irwin, 24 Feb. 1927, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. I.

terms of Das at Faridpur and the content of the National Demand. The proposed tactics were not wholly negative—the Swarajists' object was not only to throw out budgets but to introduce measures and bills necessary for the healthy growth of national life and economic interests of the country as well as for protection of freedom. Gandhi had already laid emphasis on such positive measures, and their belated acceptance meant Gandhi's influence was waxing. Motilal Nehru needed Gandhi's help as at Cawnpore. He was firmly against any compromise with the Responsivists, the Independents and the Moderate Swarajists. He had a rival in Srinivasa Iyengar, and any show of moderation on his part might have been a suicidal move. It would have been foolish to show moderations in the context of the imminent appointment of an Inquiry Commission. Lastly, a new generation of Congressmen, including his own son, Jawaharlal, had been demanding 'independence' instead of 'Swaraj', and Gandhi was required to persuade and pacify them. An alliance between Motilal and Gandhi was concluded at Gauhati against the forces of the right and the left. It was a very important step in Gandhi's second rise to power.

As for Gandhi, he cared not for the semantic satisfaction of replacing 'Swaraj' by 'Independence'. "I suggest to you", Gandhi told the Subjects Committee, "that Swaraj includes complete independence, and because it included this, Mr. Jinnah and Pandit Malaviya resisted it, and Mr. Jinnah even went out . . . . The potency of the word increases because it is undefined and is, I would say, undefinable." More to the point were the quality of the Congressman and the appropriate technique of struggle, and there the yarn franchise came in. "Swaraj would not drop from the Downing Street but by linking the Congress with the masses—through the slender cotton thread."<sup>37</sup> Khadi was not his fad, he sadly commented, but meant the living concern of the Congress for the poor.<sup>38</sup> It was "an emblem of self-assertion, self-reliance and determination to abolish artificial distinction between rich and poor, capital and labour . . . ."<sup>39</sup> Obviously, such words were meant for the rebellious and socialism-prone ears of the more youthful members of the Congress.

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37 Gandhi's speech at Subjects Committee, 27 Dec. 1926, C.W., vol. 32, pp. 465-68.

38 Do, speech at Muzaffarpur, 25 Jan. 1927, C.W., vol. 33, pp. 12-14.

39 *Young India*, 30 June 1927.

The wrangle in and out of the Congress continued. The Swarajists and the Responsivists held different views about the decision of Gauhati Congress regarding the duty of the Congress legislators to oppose the formation of ministries by other parties. Nariman and his group fell out with the Responsivists in the Bombay Council. Kelkar demanded restoration of the Sabarmati Pact and elimination of the Khadi clause. There was a straight fight between the Swarajists and the Liberals for the presidency of the Bengal Legislative Council, in which the former's nominee was roundly defeated. The B.P.C.C. executive, led by Birendra Nath Sasmal, was under fire from a combination of the aristocratic 'Big Five' and the revolutionary Karmi Sangha. The latter's victory in July caused a split. An opposition to J. M. Sengupta rallied round Subhas Chandra Bose, released from prison in May. The Swarajists even joined Sir Abdur Rahim to bring down the ministry of Ghuznavi and Chakravarti. The Swarajists were isolated in C.P. and the demand for ministerial salaries could be easily carried. Goschen, Governor of Madras, summoned N. Raju to form a ministry but the Congress refused to allow him. The former then tried to form a ministry of talents with the help of C.P.R. Iyer. An Independent ministry under Subbarayan was put up with the Swarajist help. But Gauhati Congress forbade collaboration. Satyamurthi and S. M. Mudaliar, however, continued to court the Governor.<sup>40</sup> "At present", wrote K. M. Munshi in the *Bombay Chronicle*, "like a moth-eaten cloth, the Congress Committee is more holes than cloth."

When Motilal pressed upon Gandhi the candidacy of Jawaharlal for the Congress Presidency in 1927, the latter commented, "He (Jawaharlal) is too high-souled to stand the anarchy and hooliganism that seem to be growing in the Congress, and it would be cruel to

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40 C. J. Baker, *The Politics of South India* (Vikas, 76), pp. 68-77. In view of the Congress refusal to take office, Srinivasa Iyengar did not want to vote out the Independent Ministry of Madras. It would mean a Justice Party ministry which would not help his party. When Gopala Menon moved at Bombay A.I.C.C. a censure against the Madras Swarajists for this, (15-16 May 1927), N. C. Kelkar vigorously attacked Motilal Nehru for the policy of preventing formation of Ministry by the Swarajists. The matter was ultimately referred to the Working Committee which condoned the action of the Madras Swarajists. Satyamurthi did not see eye to eye with Iyengar and looked forward to a rescission of ban on Swarajists' taking office at Madras Congress.

expect him to evolve order out of a sudden out of chaos.”<sup>41</sup> Gandhi preferred the cause of Dr. Ansari. “He won’t control the hooligans. He will let them have their way; but he may specialize in the Hindu-Muslim question and do something in the matter.”<sup>42</sup> That question had acquired so much importance that Gandhi even brushed aside the candidacy of Motilal.<sup>43</sup> Even Ansari’s *faux pas* of advocating co-operation in the Council and abolition of khadi franchise were condoned. “You have to forget Council politics,” Gandhi advised Ansari, the President-designate, “adopt an attitude of absolute neutrality and act merely as an impartial Chairman . . . but not guiding or shaping the political programme . . .”<sup>44</sup> A Muslim President was a clever political gesture in the communal context, and Motilal’s further advocacy for Jawahar<sup>45</sup> fell on deaf ears. It should be noted that Gandhi’s voice in the selection of the Congress President had begun to prevail once more.

Self-assertion in the elitist politics of the Congress was never considered to be enough by Gandhi. He went to the people once again, this time to heal the scar of untouchability in South India. While the Madras Governor, Goschen, tried to cause defection among the Madras Swarajists and the Punjab Governor, Hailey, tried to rope in Hindus of the Punjab,<sup>46</sup> and Muddiman at the Centre lent all the government support to the Muslims, “very properly and naturally”, to defeat the Swarajist candidate for the deputy-presidency of the Assembly,<sup>47</sup> Gandhi left the councillors to fight their trivial skirmishes in order to take up the challenge of a social evil which seemed to be breaking the Hindu society asunder.

The Vyakom satyagraha in Travancore had brought to his notice the sad plight of the so called “unapproachables”, who might not even use the roads to the temples. Now he saw the depth of degradation to which the higher castes had driven the Adi Karnatakas, the Lambanis and the Kaniyars of Mysore or the Ezuhvas and the Nayadis

41 Gandhi to Motilal Nehru, 19 June 1927, photostat S.N. 12867.

42 Ibid.

43 Gandhi to Sarojini Naidu, 25 June 1927; Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru, 20 July 1927; Gandhi to Ansari, 10 Aug. 1927. C.W., vol. 34, p. 57, pp. 207-8, pp. 304-5.

44 Gandhi to Ansari, 26 Aug. 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 402-03.

45 Motilal Nehru to Gandhi, tel. 23 Aug. 1927, photostat, S.N. 12873.

46 Irwin to Birkenhead, 6 Jan. 1927, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 2-8.

47 Same to same, 3 Feb. 1927, *ibid.*, p. 16.



of Travancore. In fact, the whole Brahmin-non-Brahmin controversy had to be tackled in the background of an insistent call for Satyagraha by the depressed classes. The fissures of a pluralist society were widening as political consciousness and hopes for political power spread. Would there be a *varna-war* along with a Hindu-Muslim war? And who would survive it for enjoying Swaraj?

The Swarajists were more interested in mundance issues. On the currency issue they differed widely. Motilal was ready to compromise on the rupee ratio but could not, because of opposition from Srinivasa Iyengar and Purusottomdas Thakurdas, who represented the Bombay capitalists' demand for 1s 4 d.<sup>48</sup> The Swarajists moved for an adjournment of the House to discuss an issue of privilege (this time, the non-attendance of Satyendra Chandra Mitra who had been elected to the Assembly from prison), which led to a demand for trial or release of the Bengal detenus. They moved for budget-cuts under the heads of the Railway Board or the Army Department and for an amendment to reduce the duty on salt. Further adjournment motions were brought on the despatch of troops to China, the handling of the railway strike and the Steel Protection Bill. The government won on the rupee ratio by a mere 3 votes ("It was a very near thing," according to Irwin), while Jayakar's motion for refusal of the entire budget was passed by 8 to 9 votes.

The Council politics was losing its earlier punch. The Swarajist and the Nationalist Parties had been steadily disintegrating. Srinivasa Iyengar became the leader of the Swarajists in the Assembly when Motilal went to England in the autumn of 1927. Certain Swarajists, like Doraiswamy Iyengar, T. Prakasam and Chetty were hostile to Srinivasa. The Secretary of the Party, Ranga Iyengar, resigned. Two prominent youngsters, Dewan Chamanlal and Tulsi Goswami, behaved differently on the motion of adjournment on the subject of the postponement of the Reserve Bank Bill. The Nationalist Party could show no greater unity. The deputy leader, Jayakar, was clearly out of sympathy with the leader, Malaviya, and K. C. Neogy kept an independent attitude throughout. On neither of the Reserve Bank Bill and the Cotton Yarn Bill the party acted together.

<sup>48</sup> Same to same, 10 Feb. 1927, *ibid.*, p. 24; 24 Feb. 1927, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Purusottam Das Thakurdas Papers contain much information on this issue.

The opposition of the Swarajists to the Cotton Yarn Bill was more a demonstration of the Bengal and Madras members against those from Bombay than against the Government. The Viceroy traced to their internal dissensions the wane of extremism in the Simla session of the Assembly.<sup>49</sup>

On the Hindu-Muslim front, a conference of Muslim leaders at Delhi (20 March 1927), presided over by Jinnah, proposed a conditional acceptance of joint electorate.<sup>50</sup> The Working Committee of the Congress (May 1927) welcomed it. But the Hindu minorities of Bengal and Punjab did not like the condition of reservation of seats on a population basis. Another condition, separation of Sind from Bombay, was immediately opposed by Jairamdas Daulatram; and the Sind Muhammadan Association wanted both separation of Sind and separate electorate. The Muslim League itself was divided. Jinnah stood between Muhammad Shafi (Punjab), Abdur Rahim (Bengal) and the Khilafatists (led by the Ali brothers), and was anxious to please every one to retain his influence. The Muslim manifesto for joint electorate, warned Irwin, "must not be taken at quite its face value. The statement appears to have been given by Jinnah to the Associated Press without the authority of the Conference, and without any vote even having been taken, his idea possibly being that it would enable him to reestablish his old Independent Party, containing both Hindus and Muslims... Whatever the real inwardness of the scheme was, it appears not impossible that it may widen rather than diminish the breach between the two communities."<sup>51</sup>

The Punjab Provincial Muslim League held a meeting at Lahore and Shafi was supported by Abdul Quadir, Sir Mahammad Iqbal and Malik Barkatali in his stand for separate electorate as the greatest safeguard for the Muslims. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League met at Barisal under Abdur Rahim to denounce joint electorate.<sup>52</sup> Sir Abdul Qaiyum of N.W.F.P. said that joint electorate would be disadvantageous for the weaker side.<sup>53</sup> In such a situation the Viceroy advised against any policy favouring joint electorate. "They (the Muslims) are, after all, our best friends, and *however impartial*

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49 Same to same, 29 Sept. 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 196-97.

50 *Indian Quarterly Review*, 1927, vol. I, p. 33.

51 Irwin to Birkenhead, 24 March 1927, *op. cit.* pp. 46-47.

52 Same to same, 11 May 1927, *ibid.*, p. 99.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

*it may be our duty to be*, we are not called upon as I see it to throw over our friends for new allies whose friendship has been a very uncertain quantity.”<sup>54</sup>

In fact, the Muslim and Hindu leaders were the victims of their own propaganda. “Shafi was inundated with threatening letters after Delhi Conference and bowed before the storm. Moonje was scared by similar threats from frightened Hindus of the Frontier.” Important Bengali papers like *Basumati*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Anrita Bazar Patrika* expressed the doubts and suspicions of the Bengali Hindus. The Muslims felt tricked by the Congress promise about N.W.F.P., Baluchistan and Sind, which was not for the Congress to grant.<sup>55</sup> Soon the whole atmosphere was vitiated by Lahore riots (3-7 May 1927), sparked off by the acquittal of the author of *Rangila Rasul*, a scurrilous attack on the Prophet, by the Punjab High Court. The riots spread to Bihar, Multan, Bareilly and Nagpur over issues like music before mosques, Puja and Mohurram processions and Id. But much of it was politically motivated.<sup>56</sup> Especially irritating were those caused by abuse of municipal power.<sup>57</sup> Trouble spread to the Northwest Frontier and beyond. The Khilafatists in Punjab called for boycott of Hindus.<sup>58</sup> Once again, India was in the grip of a violent communal passion which made rational dialogue impossible.

Efforts of Srinivasa Iyengar brought some sanity and prompted the Unity Conference at Simla (August) and Calcutta (November). Gandhi did not attend, “because there was no way in which his services would be of any use ... I have no sympathy for the attitude either of the Hindus or the Muslims and my presence at the Conference would have been only a hindrance.”<sup>59</sup> He had no faith in meetings and resolutions. “In an atmosphere which is surcharged with distrust, fear and hopelessness, these devices rather hinder than help heart-unity.”<sup>60</sup> In this Irwin fully concurred.<sup>61</sup> At Simla “the

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54 Same to same, 3 April 1927, *ibid.*, p. 53. Ital mine

55 Same to same, 26 May 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

56 Fortnightly Report from Bengal, first half of March 1927, Home Pol. 1927, File no. 32/1927, Jan-Dec.

57 Do from U.P., first half of April 1927, *ibid.*

58 Do from Punjab, June-Sept., 1927, *ibid.*

59 C.W., vol. 35, pp. 202-03.

60 ‘Hindu-Muslim Unity’, *Young India*, 1 Dec. 1927.

61 Irwin to Birkenhead, 15 Sept. 1927, Halifax Coll. op cit., vol. III, p. 192.

ostensible rock on which they split was the question of cowslaughter and the music before the mosques, but behind this loomed the political question of which the most important part at the present moment is the joint electorate." The moving spirit on the Muslim side were Jinnah and the Khilafatists, like the Alis, Ansari and Ajmal Khan. Raja of Mahmudabad, Sir Ali Imam and a few others might also be prepared to concede joint electorate. But they were, in Irwin's words, "muguump Moslems". They were being sabotaged by Quaiyum, Shafi, Feroze Khan Noon, Fazl-i-Husain and Zia-ud-din. Malaviya, Moonje and Lajpat Rai on the Hindu side proved no less intractable.<sup>62</sup> The Hindu Mahasabha protested against Calcutta resolutions on the cow and music questions. Gandhi himself was dissatisfied with them. He demanded categorical abandonment of cow-slaughter by the Muslims and the same of music before mosques by the Hindus.<sup>63</sup>

In the midst of these old despairs Birkenhead introduced a new note by announcing a Parliamentary Commission to consider Indian constitutional reforms. He had been eager to appoint the Commission, due in 1929, well ahead to prevent meddling by Labour.<sup>64</sup> He had wanted a Mixed Commission, as "to deny the chance of membership to all Indians is to make evident to all the world the inferiority complex with which we chose to brand the peoples of India." Secondly, a divergence of opinion was probable, and it would be of help "to you and us if the Commission took the view that a very considerable advance was not to be recommended at the moment..."<sup>65</sup> Irwin, however, was unwilling to have any Indian in the Commission. His advisers, Muddiman, Hailey and Marris, misled him on the point of composition.<sup>66</sup> He thought that a Commission, drawn from both Houses of Parliament, would have sympathy from the Liberals and

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62 Same to same, 29 Sept. 1927, *ibid.*, pp 197-99. Also A.I.C.C. files no G-64/1926-28. J N M.M.L.

63 Gandhi to Ansari, 25 Dec. 1927, G.S.N. 12391.

64 2nd Earl of Birkenhead, *Life of F. E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead* (London, 1960), pp. 511-12. Lord Reading wanted an announcement before the elections of 1926. See earlier discussion

65 Birkenhead to Irwin, 23 March 1927, Charlton Archives.

66 Irwin to Birkenhead, 19 Aug. 1926, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, p. 79; same to same, 6 Jan. 1927, *ibid.*, vol III, p. 5; Irwin's note on composition of the Commission, 10 May 1927, *encl* in same to same, 11 May 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 100-7; also Hailey to Irwin, 23 April 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 113-16 and Marris to Irwin, 25 April 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

the Responsivists. Certain provinces, like Punjab, would be unlikely to boycott it. "The Moslems almost certainly would not boycott, and this will be bound to affect the decision of the Hindus . . . with these forces participating, it is doubtful whether even the Congress party would be willing to stand aside. Even if they did, the boycott would be only partial and, as such, of considerably less effect".<sup>67</sup> Behind the official opinion worked the prejudice of non-official Europeans. Birkenhead ultimately realised that in a Mixed Commission Indian members might join the Labour members to produce an undesirable scheme.<sup>68</sup> He persuaded Macdonald to accept an all-white Commission.

Not that Irwin went unwarned of the likely repercussions on Indian opinion. V. J. Patel warned him as early as May that such a Commission would be boycotted. On his own admission, a Mixed Commission containing three or four Indians would have been well received. They might be criticised as too few to represent India, but Britain would not have been charged with racial prejudice. But he was prepared to take the risk rather than have a Mixed Commission, even after the Indians had vigorously reacted to his announcement. "I am afraid I feel", he wrote in the middle of November, "that at some point or other a clash between what even moderate Indian political leaders feel bound to demand and what the majority of British opinion would feel able to give is inevitable, and I am not sure that it is not better to have it at this stage than later".<sup>69</sup> It is clear that the infights within the Swarajya and the Nationalist Parties and the certainty of getting the support of the Shafi group of Muslims, the Liberals and several provinces encouraged him.

Gandhi was summoned to Delhi to have a pre-view on 2 November. "He struck me as singularly remote from practical politics," Irwin apprised his father. "It was rather like talking to some one who had stepped off another planet on to this for short visit of a fortnight".<sup>70</sup> "He is a good man with no power", reposted Gandhi.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Irwin to Birkenhead, 26 May 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 120-21, 2 June 1927, *ibid.*, p. 128, 16 June 1927, *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>68</sup> Irwin seems to blame Birkenhead for such a suggestion. Halifax, *The Fullness of Days*, p. 115.

<sup>69</sup> Irwin to Birkenhead, 16 Nov. 1927, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 224-25.

<sup>70</sup> Earl of Birkenhead, *Halifax, the Life of Lord Halifax*, (London 1966), p. 247.

<sup>71</sup> Gandhi to Andrews, 11 Nov. 1927.

In Irwin's version Gandhi was not interested in the procedure in which Indian representation would be associated with the Commission—as assessors or as a Select Committee of the Legislature. Gandhi simply wanted the end of British tutelage—a declaration of Dominion Status followed by a discussion with Indian leaders on the details.<sup>72</sup> *The Hindu* reported, however, that Gandhi had warned the Viceroy that the Commission would fail, the Indians would take it as an insult and boycott it, although he would not initiate the boycott himself.<sup>73</sup>

Jinnah at first urged the Viceroy to do his "utmost and secure the inclusion of at least two Indians on the Commission".<sup>74</sup> Among Muslim leaders, who opposed the Simon Commission with Jinnah, were Ali Imam, Hasan Imam, Raja of Mahmudabad, Ali brothers and Azad. Since Shafi was supporting the government, Jinnah held a separate League session at Calcutta with the help of Sir Abdur Rahim who had already allied himself with J.M. Sengupta. As a result, the Ghuznavi group rallied round the Raj. "The non-boycott Moslems", wrote Irwin, "are, I fancy, at present in the majority, but are having to support sustained and vigorous attack, probably assisted by a good deal of money, from the Jinnah crowd."<sup>75</sup> But Jinnah was soon frightened and declared that he would be bound by the decision of the Bombay League. He told Irwin that "unless he went on agitating, other people who were against him would gain ground".<sup>76</sup>

Where Irwin went wrong was in his anticipation of Liberal support. He was requesting Birkenhead in August to make Lord Sinha persuade his liberal friends not to condemn the Commission in an extreme manner,<sup>77</sup> which shows that they had been vociferously criticizing it for some time. In fact, they had been doing so since Sapru had sent the news from England that there would be no Indian in the Commission. They could not have much faith in one, which, in

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72 Earl of Birkenhead, op. cit., pp. 246-47. For similar views, see Irwin to Birkenhead, 3 Nov. 1927, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. III, pp. 208-208a.

73 *The Hindu*, 9 Nov. 1927.

74 Note on Jinnah-Irwin interview, 31 Oct. 1927. Eur. Mss. C. 152/29 and Jinnah to Irwin, 31 Oct. 1927. Ibid., 21.

75 Irwin to Birkenhead, 1 Dec. 1927. Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. III, p. 234. See also Fortnightly report for first half of Dec. 1927 from Punjab, Home Pol. File no. 32/1927.

76 Same to same, 22 Dec. 1927, ibid., p. 246.

77 Same to same, 24 Aug. 1927, ibid., p. 180a.

Sankaran. Nair's words, consisted of men "all of them English, most of them conservative, and all of them profiting indirectly from British control of Indian trade and finance"<sup>78</sup> The Liberals, so long eclipsed, were given a chance to stage a come-back. Sapru, Sivaswami Aiyar and Annie Besant signed with Srinivasa Iyenger and Jinnah a joint statement on 16 November declaring that Indians could not "conscientiously take any part or share in the work of the Commission as at present constituted." Birkenhead's speech in the Lords (24 November), repeating the old arguments of Parliamentary responsibility, Indian diversity and the unrepresentative character of Indian political parties, and challenging the Indians again to produce an agreed constitution of their own, confirmed the Indian resolve to refuse recognition to Simon.

The Madras Congress saw in it an opportunity to revive the flagging political struggle and to heal the festering communal sore. The objective conditions were helpful or so it seemed to the young generation, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. The economic crisis, soon to deepen into a world slump, had registered itself in the fall of prices of Indian exports, mainly raw materials, while India was being obliged to pay higher prices for imported manufactured goods. The decline in the earnings from jute, cotton, oilseeds, grain, etc. hit the primary producers and, by a chain reaction,, others connected with land.<sup>79</sup> There was a temporary

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<sup>78</sup> *Contemporary Review*, Feb. 1928, pp 153-54. For Sapru's views, see K. Dwarkadas, *India's Fight for Freedom, 1913-37 : An Eye-witness Story*, p. 327.

| 79      | IMPORTS                                |                                       |                               | EXPORTS  |  |                    |
|---------|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|
|         | Merchandise<br>(Private)<br>(Rs. 1000) | Pt. & Govt.<br>treasure<br>(Rs. 1000) | Govt.<br>Stores<br>(Rs. 1000) | Merchandise<br>(Indian<br>produce)<br>(Rs. 1000) | Pt. & Govt.<br>-treasure<br>(Rs. 1000) | Foreign<br>produce |
| 1924-5  | 2,46,62,54                             | 99,19,85                              | 6,73,83                       | 3,94,66,53                                       | 5,16,81                                | 13,50,91           |
| 1925-26 | 2,26,17,78                             | 55,48,77                              | 9,82,35                       | 3,74,84,21                                       | 3,83,92                                | 10,48,48           |
| 1926-27 | 2,31,22,08                             | 41,53,21                              | 9,59,76                       | 3,01,43,58                                       | 2,21,13                                | 8,00,98            |
| 1927-28 | 2,49,83,65                             | 34,89,53                              | 11,68,74                      | 3,19,15,35                                       | 3,13,61                                | 9,53,76            |
| 1928-29 | 2,53,30,60                             | 37,29,42                              | 10,09,20                      | 3,30,12,79                                       | 6,35,31                                | 7,83,33            |
| 1929-30 | 2,40,79,69                             | 27,83,20                              | 8,91,05                       | 3,10,80,55                                       | 5,14,33                                | 7,12,69            |
| 1930-31 | 1,64,79,37                             | 26,85,34                              | 8,26,89                       | 2,20,49,26                                       | 4,00,08                                | 5,14,40            |

TABLE NO. 204 : Statistical Abstracts for British India from 1924-25 to 1933-34.

## 79 footnotes continued

Value of principle articles of import into British India  
(in Rs. 1000)

|         | Apparel | Cotton<br>manuf. | Cycles  | Drugs   | Hard-<br>ware | Instru-<br>ments | Machi-<br>nery | Chem-<br>icals |
|---------|---------|------------------|---------|---------|---------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1924-25 | 1,54,39 | 72,66,20         | 77,24   | 1,69,64 | 4,98,69       | 3,02,16          | 14,74,07       | 2,08,83        |
| 1925-26 | 1,65,61 | 57,99,06         | 1,01,25 | 1,73,11 | 5,19,57       | 5,53,83          | 14,88,59       | 2,02,63        |
| 1926-27 | 1,77,87 | 58,42,30         | 1,07,07 | 1,90,02 | 5,06,62       | 4,01,19          | 13,93,14       | 2,44,35        |
| 1927-28 | 1,64,45 | 58,36,69         | 1,17,62 | 1,98,28 | 5,24,42       | 4,46,52          | 15,93,75       | 2,63,93        |
| 1928-29 | 1,82,99 | 56,95,58         | 1,29,25 | 2,02,13 | 5,23,28       | 4,91,17          | 18,36,04       | 2,47,94        |
| 1929-30 | 1,71,24 | 53,48,97         | 1,18,99 | 2,26,25 | 5,06,65       | 5,38,20          | 18,21,85       | 2,78,74        |

TABLE NO. 209, *ibid.*

## Value of principal articles of export from British (in Rs. 1000)

|         | Raw<br>cotton | Twist &<br>yarn | Cotton<br>manuf. | Rice     | Wheat    | Jute manuf. | Raw jute |
|---------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|----------|----------|-------------|----------|
| 1924-25 | 91,47,03      | 3,70,11         | 7,57,36          | 37,23,01 | 17,19,50 | 51,76,66    | 29,09,30 |
| 1925-26 | 95,25,50      | 2,93,37         | 6,71,48          | 39,97,50 | 3,60,25  | 58,83,98    | 37,94,57 |
| 1926-27 | 58,94,19      | 3,08,54         | 7,66,32          | 33,19,86 | 2,71,07  | 53,18,09    | 26,78,04 |
| 1927-28 | 48,01,38      | 1,87,91         | 6,79,32          | 34,00,72 | 4,40,57  | 53,56,43    | 30,66,26 |
| 1928-29 | 66,41,52      | 1,95,67         | 5,83,89          | 26,46,85 | 1,69,24  | 56,90,49    | 32,34,92 |
| 1929-30 | 65,22,67      | 1,90,24         | 5,28,43          | 31,50,92 | 21,24    | 51,92,68    | 27,17,38 |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | Seeds    | Tea         |          |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | 33,16,85 | 33,39,24    |          |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | 29,63,68 | 27,12,17    |          |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | 19,08,77 | 29,03,78    |          |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | 26,69,30 | 32,48,49    |          |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | 29,62,52 | 26,60,44    |          |
|         |               |                 |                  |          | 26,46,76 | 26,00,64    |          |

TABLE NO. 213, *ibid.*

## Index no. of prices in India (Price in 1873 = 100)

| Year    | Exported<br>articles | Imported<br>articles | General Index No.<br>for all articles |
|---------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1924-25 | 222                  | 217                  | 221                                   |
| 1925-26 | 233                  | 211                  | 227                                   |
| 1926-27 | 225                  | 195                  | 216                                   |
| 1927-28 | 209                  | 185                  | 202                                   |
| 1928-29 | 212                  | 171                  | 201                                   |
| 1929-30 | 216                  | 170                  | 203                                   |
| 1930-31 | 177                  | 157                  | 171                                   |

TABLE NO. 302, *ibid.*



recovery in 1927 but a downward trend settled from 1928. The Bombay capitalists, led by Purusottamdas Thakurdas, considered themselves to have been defrauded by the rupee-ratio.<sup>80</sup> An avowedly protectionist iron and steel tariff was imposed in 1924 and the cotton excise was abolished altogether in 1926. But while Britain's textiles were becoming unremunerative, it was difficult to satisfy the protectionist urge of the Indians fully. Rejection of the Textile Tariff Board's recommendations for raising import duties on cloth and yarn hit the Bombay and Ahmedabad mill-owners hard. "There is always a danger of the (cotton) mill-owners", reports Irwin, "who are, I believe, about two-third Indian, buying support of the Swarajists and making trouble in the Assembly."<sup>81</sup> They made trouble in the Congress, too.

Index no of retail prices of food grains in India  
(1873 = 100)

|         | Rice | Wheat | Jawar | Bajra | Ragi | Gram | Barley |
|---------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|
| 1924-25 | 335  | 246   | 239   | 239   | 380  | 195  | 207    |
| 1925-26 | 352  | 294   | 283   | 294   | 347  | 241  | 269    |
| 1926-27 | 359  | 281   | 295   | 310   | 324  | 274  | 276    |
| 1927-28 | 368  | 267   | 293   | 274   | 353  | 280  | 259    |
| 1928-29 | 357  | 264   | 253   | 257   | 356  | 295  | 272    |
| 1929-30 | 336  | 262   | 294   | 312   | 347  | 340  | 284    |
| 1930-31 | 273  | 177   | 207   | 211   | 262  | 232  | 155    |

TABLE NO. 301, *ibid.*

80 See earlier discussion on rupee ratio. The Swarajists, at first divided, voted against 1s. 6d. The government won by only three votes. The 'battle of the ratio' ended on 8 March, 1927. "It was a very near thing . . ." Irwin to Birkenhead, 9 March 1927, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 39. In February we find him reporting that Sapruji Saklatvala had told the Congress that the agitation for 1s. 4d. was a "capitalist ramp to reduce wages." Same to same, 3 Feb. 1927, *ibid.*, p. 16. The President of the Calcutta session of the Industrial and Commercial Congress, on the other hand, compared the currency and exchange policy of the Government with the acts of the E.I. Co. Fortnightly Report from Bombay for first half of January 1927, Home Pol. 1927, File no. 32/1927. See also Purusottamdas Thakurdas papers in J.N.M.M.L., New Delhi.

81 Irwin to Birkenhead, 22 June 1927, *ibid.*, p. 740. See Birkenhead's commiseration on behalf of Lancashire cotton industry against any increase in tariff on British imports as a result of investigation by the Tariff Board. Birkenhead to Irwin, 7 Oct., 14 Oct. 1926, *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 102-10.

The level of taxation in the country was high, admitted Blackett, the Finance Member. Supertaxes were higher than those in England. The scale of military expenditure (55 crores) was unprecedented in peace time. It pressed upon nation-building activities. The popular demand for its reduction was "not a mere political catch word". The total debt had surpassed a thousand crore.<sup>82</sup> Yet he rejected Keynesian notions of regulating exchange rates to secure an optimum internal price level as impracticable.<sup>82a</sup>

Meanwhile, labour movement had made considerable progress in Bombay and Calcutta, and communism was slowly finding its footing in the country. From 1920 onwards M. N. Roy had been trying to found "a live Communist Party in India".<sup>83</sup> With some agents of doubtful calibre, as many 'leaders' as 'parties', a greedy opportunism exhibited by many, the borrowed plumes of Bolshevism and the scanty funds of the Comintern (often sent to people independently of Roy) could hardly succeed in a field dominated by Gandhi's non-cooperation idea. But Gandhi soon lost his direct contact with labour and the Bardoli resolution meant giving up the cause of the peasantry. Here was a vacuum for the communists to exploit.

Ray's thesis on the relationship of Soviet Russia and communists with colonial nationalist movements and Lenin's rebuttals are well-known.<sup>84</sup> The fourth Congress of the Comintern (Nov.-Dec. 1922) asked the communists of the colonial countries to take part in the national struggle and the fifth Congress (1924) asked them to form

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82 Blackett's note on financial situation, 4 July 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 150-56.

82a. B. R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929-1942* (Lond., 1976), pp. 14-15.

83 For the Government point of view, see Sir Cecel Kaye, *Communism in India* (1925), Sir David Petrie, *Communism in India 1924-1927* (Calcutta, 1927), ed. M. Saha, Chapters II & III. For C.P.I. point of view, see G. Adhikari (ed), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vol I (1917-1922) (P.P.H. 1971), general int. Also Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communist Party of India : Years of Formation (1921-1933)*, Calcutta, 1959; M. N. Roy, *Memoirs* (Delhi, 1964); John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India etc.* (Bombay, 1971).

84 E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, vol. 3, pp. 252-57 and p. 480; M. N. Roy, *Memoirs* (Delhi, 1964), pp. 378-82; Lenin, *Sochineniya*, XXV, pp. 285-90; Roy's letters to Dange (7 Sept., 2 Nov. 1922) and to Singaravelu Chettiar (2 Nov. 1922) also express his ideas. See *Conviction . . . in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, no. 12, p. 43 (a summary of the secret report on communist activities prepared by P.C. Bamford, Dy. Dir, C.I.B. in 1923-24).

groups and take part in the national struggle, while promoting a social movement. Roy's proposal to start a Labour Information Bureau, which would be affiliated with Indian trade unions, had been accepted in 1923. While Roy tried through Muzaffar Ahmad to gather up his erstwhile terrorist friends, some of his men (Chamanlal, S. A. Dange and Singaravelu Chettiar) were called upon to capture the Trade Union Congress. We see them involved in the fourth A.I.T.U.C. (Calcutta, 1924), presided over by C. R. Das. The Director of Intelligence found in this an attempt to secure "a dangerously tactical position" between the terrorists and the extremists in the Congress.

The first batch of Moscow-trained communists began to arrive in 1922. Shaukat Usmani contacted Chettiar, Dange, Ahmad, Sampurnanand and even Jawaharlal Nehru. The Communist Party of Great Britain sent emissaries like Percy Glading and George Allison. The Government could not continue to be an observer and struck the principal lieutenants of Roy by the Cownpore Conspiracy Case.<sup>85</sup> Undaunted, even inspired by persecution, the communists formed the Party of India at the end of 1925.<sup>86</sup> Moscow-trained communists began to arrive again from the next year. Philip Spratt from Britain followed in the steps of Allison and Saklatvala in those of Spratt. The policy of Roy as well as the Comintern was to penetrate the Congress through a Republican Wing and the Trade Union Congress through work in trade unions, liberating the labour movement from the harmful influence of "the nationalist politicians like Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru, etc. and careerists like Chamanlal."<sup>87</sup> The name of C. P. I., Roy advised, should be replaced by Workers' and Peasants' Parties to avoid Government suspicion. The latter were set up in Bombay and Calcutta but the former was not dissolved. Roy's other suggestion of starting a People's Party—a sort of an open revolutionary nationalist party in which the working class organised in its own party would enter—was much too subtle to be effected. At the annual session (Bombay, 31 May 1927) the C. P. I. resolved to form a strong left wing in the Indian National Congress, which, in coopera-

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85 Home Pol., File no 261, 1924.

86 Dr. Adhikari claims that the C.P.I. was born in 1925 in the 'first Indian Conference' at Kanpur. G. Adhikari (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vol. 2 (P.P.H., 1975). After a split with Satya Bhakta's group, the headquarters of C.P.I. was transferred to Bombay.

87 Roy to Begerhotta, March 1926, ref in Petrie, op. cit., p. 100.

tion with 'radical nationalists', would force the Congress to adopt a programme based on democratic principles and suitable to the toiling masses of India. The C.P.I. was not yet affiliated to the Third International, and the clash between the Indian communists and Saklatvala at Bombay are testimony to the general lack of stability within the party itself. But a foundation had been laid and soon other front organisations, like the League against Imperialism, would fan the fire. The Indian National Congress appointed Jawaharlal Nehru its sole representative at the Brussels Conference of the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism (Feb. 1927) from which he returned with socialist ideas, sympathetic to the Third International, the headquarters of which he visited in November.<sup>88</sup> He could still be starry-eyed about Russia. Next month, Stalin's offensive against the kulak would open a new chapter in Russian history.

All these comings and goings resulted in a spurt of trade union activities, especially in textile mills and railways. The successful textile workers' strike in Bombay (1925), caused by a wages cut of 11½%, had showed the way. The Northwestern Railway followed, under the aegis of the All India Railwaymen's Federation, founded in the same year. Bengal jute mills went out of action in 1926. Railway strikes were organised throughout India in 1927, the most spectacular being that of the Bengal Nagpur Railway workshops. Madras saw tram and rail strikes as well as strikes in printing presses, Burma Oil Company and Coimbatore cotton mills<sup>89</sup>. A. I. T. U. C. had contacts

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88 He would not advise affiliation of the Congress with the League against Imperialism because of "the socialist character of the League and the possibility that Russian foreign policy might influence it." Quoted by Michael Brecher, *Nehru : A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1959), fn. 2, pp. 113-14. See also S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru A Biography*, vol. I 1889-1947 (Oxford, 1976), pp. 100 et seq. on Nehru's role at the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism at Brussels, as a member of its Executive Committee afterwards, and during visit to Russia. He recommended to the W.C. that the I.N.C. might become an associate member of the League. Why, he explained in a letter to Gandhi, 22 April 1927, Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 2 p. 326.

89 Fortnightly reports from Madras, Bengal, etc. Home Pol. 1927, File no. 32/1927, Jan.-Dec. Those from Madras give some information on the activities of Singaravelu Chettiar and Saklatvala; those from Bombay on activities of Spratt. The Governor in Council sanctioned prosecution of Spratt under sec. 124 I.P.C. as author of the pamphlet '*India and China*' in Sept. Monteath to Haig, 16/19 Sept. 1927, no S. D. 1065, Fortnightly Report from Bombay, first half of Sept. 1927.

with both British and Russian Labour but the Indian communists and the Third International were increasing their influence over predominantly bourgeois leaders.

Internal politics of the Swarajya Party and the impact of Soviet experiment on young Congress leaders combined to produce the complete independence resolution at Madras Congress at the end of 1927. Coatman, the Director of Public Information, adds to it the desire of all delegates to make a spirited response to exclusion of Indians from the Simon Commission. Actually, Srinivasa Iyengar made a bid to gain the leadership of the Swarajya Party in Motilal Nehru's absence by supporting the Independence Resolution brought up by Motilal's son. Annie Besant lent her weight. Coatman knew that the resolution meant nothing,<sup>90</sup> and Jawaharlal wonders at its unanimous adoption. "This all-round support was very gratifying", he comments in *Autobiography*, "but I had an uncomfortable feeling that the resolutions were either not understood for what they were, or distorted to mean something else"<sup>91</sup> The party accepted adherence to the goal of independence, without incorporating it into the Congress constitution.

Gandhi was furious when he heard of it. "It was hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed", he admonished Jawaharlal, "you are going too fast ... I do not know whether you still believe in unadulterated non-violence. But even if you have altered your views you could not think that unlicensed and unbridled violence is going to deliver the country ..."<sup>92</sup> V. J. Patel reacted in the same way. "His anxiety", reports Irwin, "is a reflex of anxiety in other quarters ..."<sup>93</sup>

Nehru's reply was symptomatic of the younger generation's impatience with Gandhi's bewildering leadership. If the Subjects Committee and the Congress had not passed the independence resolution earlier, Jawaharlal wrote back, it was only out of regard for Gandhi. "I hope you will agree with me that it is not healthy

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<sup>90</sup> Note of J. Coatman, encl in Irwin to Peel, 15 Nov. 1928, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 260-64.

<sup>91</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., p. 167. Coatman agrees.

<sup>92</sup> Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru, 4 Jan 1928, J. Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>93</sup> Irwin to Birkenhead, 18 Jan. 1928, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. IV, p. 6.

politics for any organisation to subordinate its own definite opinion on a public issue out of personal regard only." Again, how could a nationalist organisation have dominion status as its goal? "The very idea strangles me". Gandhi had chastised them as an angry school master ("We have almost sunk to the level of a school boys' debating society"). But Gandhi was "a school master who will not guide us or give us lessons but will only point out from time to time the error of our ways".

Something had gone wrong with Gandhi since 1924. His repeated changes in position had left all bewildered. Only faith in his leadership had kept his followers in an expectant mood. "But such faith for an irreligious person like me is a poor reed to rely on and I am beginning to think if we are to wait for freedom till khadi becomes universal in India we shall have to wait till the Greek Kalends." ... He ridiculed Gandhi's "little books like *Hind Swaraj*". He did not think the West to be incurably decadent or the East inherently superior or that *Ramraj* would be very alluring. Gandhi had paid little attention to the merits of industrialization which alone could solve the problems of poverty, if it was cured of the canker capitalism.<sup>94</sup> Here was a full-fledged declaration of revolt against Gandhi's ideas and technique of leadership.

Had Gandhi cared to keep close to the mind of the younger generation, he would have seen it brewing. Its sudden revelation caught him off guard and hurt him deeply. He relieved Jawaharlal from allegiance: "For if I am wrong, I am evidently doing irreparable harm to the country and it is your duty after having known it to rise in revolt against me ...". He was aggrieved to lose "a comrade so valiant ...; but in serving a cause, comradeships have got to be sacrificed". He offered to publish the correspondence from which Jawaharlal recoiled. The differences should not be exaggerated, the latter hastened to make amends, "... am I not your child in politics, though perhaps a truant and errant child?"<sup>95</sup>

The differences between the two cannot be explained only by 'generation gap' or temperamental conflict. They represented two opposed views of industrial civilization, socio-economic problems created by it and their solution. Like many of his age and more

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94 Jawaharlal Nehru to Gandhi, 11 Jan. 1928, photostat, S. N. 13039.

95 Gandhi to J. Nehru, 17 Jan. 1928, C.W., vol. 32, pp. 468-9; J. Nehru to Gandhi, 23 Jan. 1928.

young than he, Jawaharlal was touched by the leaven of Marxist thought and inspired by the Russian revolution. The poverty, the squalor and the misery he had seen every day from his lofty and secure perch at Anandbhavan must have filled his warm and sensitive, if a little too emotional, soul with a desperate longing to declare an all-out challenge to their *causa causans*—British imperialism. He was disgusted with council politics, symbolised by his own father, which catered only for the elites. For some time Gandhi became Motilal's surrogate. But Jawaharlal was as confused by Gandhi's abrupt recall of the mass movement in 1922 and the bewildering changes in position since 1924 as by his obscurantist ideas on civilization, society, state and religion. The rest was sheer communal politics to Young Nehru, either saffron or green. The trade union activities of 1925-27, the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case, the Brussels Conference and the short visit to Russia were opening out for him a new vista, a more congenial and meaningful political approach which would satisfy his psychological need to revolt—against father, Gandhi and imperialism, all together. Independence was to be the prolegomenon of a socialist state as well as adulthood.

But a satyagrahi like Gandhi could not accept the rigid programme of class war since he had to provide for constantly changing demands of human relations. Desiring to convert rather than confront his opponent, he must himself remain open to conversion. His was an experiment in endless becoming in a world which was relative and mutable. A centralised and industrialized utopia could not appeal to one who had drawn deeply from the Gita on the one hand, and Tolstoy, Morris and Ruskin, on the other. "The ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy." Ramraj would not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But "it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals .... The outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it".

This village-based society would tend towards equality and non-violence, for 'violence is bred in inequality'. But such equality would not be brought by class war. In Gandhi's socio-economic set-up the rich should be the trustees for the poor. When, in the wake of the fixation of the rupee-ratio at 1s. 6d., the mill-owners proposed to reduce wages, Gandhi called the policy suicidal. "What is wanted at

this time is not antagonizing labour, but making common cause with labour and regarding mill-hands as much proprietors of the mills as the shareholders and agents. A combination, therefore, between the millowners, the mill-hands and the masses would be an irremediable curb which the Government dare not ignore . . . ”<sup>96</sup> The rupee-ratio and the Tariff Board Report were gifts to Lancashire; and capitalists and labourers must combine, through boycott of foreign cloth and other forms of struggle, to undo it. Let the unjust policy open the eyes of all—landlord, tenant, capitalist and worker—and force them to combine against the British, not to combat with one another. “I am quite of your opinion”, he conceded to Jawaharlal on 1 April 1928, “that some day we shall have to start an intensive movement without the rich people and without the vocal educated class. But that time is not yet.” Gandhi was afraid that, as a Marxist, Nehru would countenance violence in constructing his free state “I had not read the (Independence) resolution asking the Congress to drop ‘peaceful and legitimate means’ and change the expression into ‘by all possible means’. Independence I can swallow, ‘by all means’ is unswallowable”. Thus Gandhi to Jawaharlal on 24 April 1928.

On this score Gandhi need not have been so apprehensive. Birkenhead exaggerated when he described Jawaharlal as “a stormy petrel scouring the waters of discontent”. Nehru acknowledged communism to be a very vital factor in world politics. Personally he was attracted by its ideology. But so far as the Youth Leagues he was sponsoring were concerned, “it is certainly not committed to communism or any other ‘ism’ and its doors are open to those who may be communistically inclined as well as those who consider communism the special gift of the Evil one”.<sup>97</sup> “Our main purpose is to discuss social, political and economic problems and hammer out the truth.” When Viren Chattopadhyaya (the erstwhile leader of the Berlin Independence Committee) invited him to take up the leadership of a communist revolution in India, Jawaharlal wrote, “I am not afraid as I have often stated of violence that may be thrust upon us. But I do think that essentially our movement will have to be carried on more or less peaceful lines including some kinds of civil disobedience and non-payment of rents and taxes if necessary.” He did

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Lancashire Block’, C.W., vol. 34, pp. 47-9.

<sup>97</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru to Bhagwat Dayal, 3 April 1929, S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Delhi, 1973), vol. IV, p. 7; Address to Allahabad Youth League, 11 Aug. 1929, *ibid.*, p. 17.



not fully accept Marxist ideology, and he realised that "as India is today the strongest appeal must necessarily come from nationalism."<sup>98</sup>

The boycott of Simon Commission, joined by almost all parties, was a great success. The Legislative Assembly, too, voted for boycott. Irwin compared it to a child refusing to eat its supper: "when its tempers are ignored it may return to eat it on its own". The All Parties Conference (summoned to Delhi in February 1928), bent on producing a constitution in response to Birkenhead's second challenge (24 November 1927), was putting up a miserable show.<sup>99</sup> "We are engaged in an unequal duel between clever whole-timers acting with one mind and part-timers having many irons in the fire and having almost as many minds as our numbers".<sup>100</sup> While Simon was "trading on the untouchables" and roping in the Princes, perhaps as third and fourth barriers to the national demand, Jinnah was backing out on the plea of lack of authority from the League. Malaviya and Lajpat were prepared to ally with the Congress but Moonje and Kelkar would rather stick to communal electorate than redistribute the provinces.<sup>101</sup> The Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh leaders were strongly opposed to any reservation for the Muslims, to which the Madras Congress had become committed and to which Gandhi felt morally bound.<sup>102</sup> The Muslim League was split between Jinnah and Shafi groups and the latter in the Lahore session (31 Dec. 1927 — 1 January 1928) turned its face away from the joint electorate for good. Irwin refers to "the extreme discomfort in which Jinnah is finding himself as he contemplates the possibility of being swallowed by the Congress Party and forfeiting completely any hold he might have had on Moslems".<sup>103</sup>

The All Parties Conference at Lucknow struggled manfully to produce an agreed report (known after Motilal Nehru), demanding

98 Jawaharlal Nehru to Virendra Chattopadhyaya, 5 Dec. 1928, *ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 117-18. Even in his presidential speech at A.I.T.U.C., Nagpur (1929) he confessed that, with all his sympathies for the Soviet Union, he did not appreciate many of their methods and would not like A.I.T.U.C. to be affiliated to the Third International. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

99 Gandhi to J. Nehru, 26 Feb. 1928, photostat, S. N. 13079.

100 Gandhi to M. Nehru, 29 Feb. 1928, photostat, S. N. 13083.

101 Irwin to Birkenhead, 23 Feb. 1928, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 29; same to same, 12 April 1928, *ibid.*, p. 89.

102 Gandhi to M. Nehru, 3 March 1928, Motilal Nehru Papers, File no. G-1.

103 Irwin to Birkenhead, 8 March 1928, Halifax Coll. *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 36.

Dominion Status (not *independence* as the Madras Congress had resolved), abolition of separate electorate but reservation of seats for Muslims in non-Muslim provinces and for non-Muslims in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan (Jawaharlal wanted it to be for a limited period of ten years), upgrading of N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan to provincial status, separation of Sind from Bombay, direct election on adult franchise, declaration of fundamental rights and a secular state. But in trying to accomodate the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh League, Motilal did away with reservation for any community in Bengal and Punjab. In this he departed from the Madras Congress formula which Gandhi had affirmed. Jawaharlal's suggestion for a democratic socialist republic was unceremoniously brushed aside.

The Viceroy was not unduly worried. "Most people seem to think that 90% of Moslem opinion which is not represented on the All Parties Conference will have nothing to do with the joint electorate, and that, even among the 10% which remains—made up as it is of Khilafatists and Jinnah's followers—there will be some discussions".<sup>104</sup> This proved true. Shaukat Ali quarreled with Motilal, Ansari and Gandhi over reservation of seats in Bengal and Punjab (the two Muslim majority provinces).<sup>105</sup> Jinnah, frightened by the hostility of the Bombay Provincial Muslim League,<sup>106</sup> presented several amendments to the Convention at Calcutta (December 1928).<sup>107</sup> His demands (later known as 'fourteen points') were voted down, in spite of Sapru's plea for sympathetic consideration. "One of the grounds of their decision", writes Jayakar to Gandhi, "was that the Mahommedans were divided on these demands, into four well-known groups. Three of them were against joint electorates at any price. It was therefore not clear on whose behalf Mr. Jinnah spoke, and what bulk of the entire Mahommedan community would be placated if his demands were conceded". If further concessions were made, the Government would pick them out and make them parts of a constitution entirely different from the one of which they were introduced to be part and

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104 Same to same, 23 Aug. 1928, *ibid.*, p. 169.

105 (a) Shaukat Ali to Gandhi, 23 Oct. 1928, C.W., vol. 38, App. II; (a) Shaukat Ali's speech at Jumma Masjid, 26 Oct. 1928, Home Pol., Fort-nightly report for second half of Oct. 1928, file no. 1 of 1928; (c) Muhammad Ali expressed his disgust also. *Hamdard*, Sept. 1928, quoted in the *Mussalman*, 15 Sept. 1928; (d) Muhammad Ali's speech at Khilafat Conference, 25 Dec. 1928, I.Q.R., vol. II, p. 402.

106 Irwin to Peel, 12 Dec. 1928, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 272.

107 A.I.C.C. Papers, file no. 10/1928 (J.N.M.M.L.).

regard the Hindus as estopped from raising objections.<sup>108</sup> Moonje would not change a single comma of Nehru Report; Motilal considered the fourteen points to be "utter nonsense" and Gandhi, to whom "the atmosphere is too foggy to see clearly", reported the Ali brothers' distrust of "the whole (practically) of my associates".<sup>109</sup> Ansari primarily accuses 'Hindu Mahasabha friends' of finally destroying the Madras accord, already partially demolished at Lucknow, but does not spare Motilal for leaning towards them.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the reason, the Muslims were alienated, and their All Parties Conference (controlled by Shafi) at Delhi (1 January 1929) signalled the failure of Hindu-Muslim accord on the constitution. The Government was put at ease. "Throughout the last two months", states the fortnightly report for the second half of October, 1928, "the evil of communal hatred showed signs by healing. The difference over the Nehru Report has to some extent reopened the wound".

Gandhi was never interested in subtleties of constitution making. Horse-trading left him cold. "I have no faith in a legislative solution of the communal question".<sup>111</sup> He believed in sanction rather than in detailed provision. He and Vallabhbhai Patel showed what he meant by sanction at Bardoli in the first few months of 1928.

The issue was a revised land-tax, an increase of 22%, at Bardoli in Gujrat. The Viceroy admits wrong handling by the Bombay Government. "The work of the original settlement officer—an Indian called Jayakar—was such that, when his Report came up to the Settlement Commissioner, the latter felt justified in passing very caustic strictures upon it. But his own work does not seem to have been quite watertight either. In these circumstances, six months ago or more, I am sure that it would have been wise for the Bombay Government to order re-enquiry *de novo* by a new officer". The Bombay Government, however, felt the reassessment to be just and generous, although its premises were wrong, and did not take this

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108 Jayakar to Gandhi, 23 Aug. 1929. Jayakar Papers, file no. 407, VI, pp. 149-51. Irwin mentions the Ali brothers' desire to take vengeance on Jinnah and the help they obtained from Ghuznavi as contributory factors to Jinnah's weakness. Irwin to Birkenhead, 24 Nov. 1927, Halifax Coll., *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 227 and same to same, 12 Dec. 1928, *op. cit.*

109 Gandhi to Motilal Nehru, 12 Aug. 1929 and Motilal Nehru to Gandhi, 14 Aug. 1929. Motilal Nehru Papers, file no. G-I (J.N.M.M.L.).

110 Ansari to Gandhi, 13 Feb. 1930, Md. Ali Papers, Moh/L-6032-39.

111 Gandhi to M. Nehru, 8 May 1928, photostat, S. N. 13218.

course.<sup>112</sup> It was greeted with dismay by the small landlords in the area and to their rescue came an ardent Gujrati follower of Gandhi—Vallabhbhai' Patel.

"This campaign", Gandhi wrote, "cannot be properly deemed to be a no-tax campaign launched for the attainment of Swaraj as Bardoli would have done in 1922. This Satyagraha has a limited scope, has a specified local object ..." It was in the nature of Champaran or Kaira, Gandhi's feeler rather than an all-out offensive. All that Patel wanted was an impartial tribunal to arbitrate on the question of land revenue. Failing to obtain this, people ceased to pay a portion of the tax which they thought to have been improperly imposed. They remained perfectly non-violent in spite of sale of movables, confiscation of large properties for paltry arrears and imprisonment. They stood firm against seduction and threat. When *Patils* and *talatis* began to resign *en masse*, the Government agreed to institute an enquiry by a revenue official but still demanded prior deposit of the enhanced part of the rent and abandonment of the movement. Patel would not be satisfied with less than a full and open enquiry by a Committee, which would adequately represent people, and *status quo ante bellum*. When the Bombay Government put pressure on Surat M. L. C's to accept terms and intended arresting Patel, Gandhi moved on to the scene. But he would not allow even a limited sympathetic Satyagraha, till the Government went to the farthest limit and the people stood the last heat. Patel was generous enough to waive enquiry into allegations of coercion when at last a compromise was concluded on 6/7 August 1928.<sup>113</sup>

Though Jawaharlal in his speech before the Lucknow All Parties Conference rejected the Dominion Status formula, as the Empire "stands for one part domineering over and exploiting the other" and Dominion Status was merely a promotion from the exploited to the exploiting section, Gandhi gave his full backing to the Nehru Report.<sup>114</sup>

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112 Irwin to Birkenhead, 19 July 1928, Halifax Coll., op. cit. vol. IV, p. 163.

113 C.W., vol. 37, pp. 99-106, p. 113, pp. 131-2, 179-80, App. I & II; *Navajivan*, 15, 29 July and 12 Aug. 1928; *Young India*, 19, 26 July and 2 Aug. 1928. Narahari D. Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel*, vol. I, ch. XXVI.

114 Gandhi to M. Nehru, 31 Aug. 1928; 'The Nehru Report', *Young India*, 16 Aug. 1928 and 'All Eyes on Lucknow', *ibid.*, 23 Aug. 1928. The resolution, passed at Lucknow, was, however, highly ambiguous although an overwhelming majority seemed to have rejected 'independence'.

"Dominion status can easily become more than Independence, if we have sanction to back it ..."<sup>115</sup> And he had got the sanction of Bardoli. His faith in non-violence in the political field has been rejuvenated.<sup>116</sup> Such faith met with an immediate test when Lala Lajpat Rai died of nervous shock caused by police assault, while leading boycotters against Simon Commission at Lahore.<sup>117</sup> Jawaharlal himself was beaten up at Lucknow a few days later. The day of final struggle, Gandhi warned, "is fast coming, faster than most of us imagine."<sup>118</sup>

One more hurdle had to be crossed—the angry young men of the Congress, led by Jawaharlal and Subhas, in the increasingly violent atmosphere created by terrorism, trade unionism and student movements. With regard to the terrorists, the Government's policy had been to release more and more of Regulation III, the Bengal Criminal Law Amd. Act and the Bengal Ordinance prisoners, while providing for arrest of new people for new conspiracies and rearrest of those released, if implicated in them. Neither Lytton nor his temporary successor, Hugh Stephenson, wanted to hasten in view of stray outrages and the Kakori Conspiracy Case.<sup>119</sup> If the new Bengal Governor, Stanley Jackson, agreed to fall in with Irwin, the police chief (the redoubtable Tegart) advised caution.<sup>120</sup> Terrorism was not confined to Bengal. The Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army was formed at the end of 1928. Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Rajguru and Chandra-sekhar Azad were soon to face the Lahore Conspiracy Case for the murder of D.S.P. Saunders who had made the brutal assault on Lala Lajpat Rai which caused his death (17 Nov.). Jawaharlal was sponsoring Youth Leagues all over the country. Punjab Governor Hailey was apprehensive of the object of the Nau-Jawan Bharat Conference and

115 *Young India*, 6 Sept. 1928.

116 Gandhi to C. F. Andrews, 24 Aug. 1928, photostat, G.N. 2629.

117 Sir Edward Wakefield, *Past Imperative. My Life in India 1927-1947* (London, 1966), pp. 14-15.

118 'The Assault of Lalaji', *Navajiban*, 4 Nov. 1928; 'Its Gory Career', *Young India*, 6 Dec. 1928.

119 George Stephenson to Irwin, 9 Aug. 1926, encl. in Irwin to Birkenhead, 19 Aug 1926, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. II, pp. 84-86. See also *Terrorism in India 1917-1936*, op. cit., App. 2.

120 Compare the Fortnightly Reports on position of prisoners in January and December 1927. Home Pol., File no. 32/Jan.-Dec. 1927.

even the Punjab Congress Committee got alarmed at the repercussions of Nehru's Amritsar and Lahore speeches on the students.<sup>121</sup>

Aggressive trade unionism, sponsored by the Indian communists and their British mentors (Spratt, Johnston and Bradley), further contributed to this atmosphere of violence. The Workers' and Peasants' Party in Bombay (founded in 1927) had organised the Girni Kamgar Union of Bombay textile workers, which struck work in 1928 for an uninterrupted period of six months. It was followed by railway workshop strikes and jute mill strikes in Bengal.<sup>122</sup> The activities of the Girni Kamgar Union caused, according to Government enquiry, riots in February, April and May in which 184 men were killed. Irwin admitted unnecessary retrenchment and ungenerous wages and housing policies of the railways and textile mills to be responsible for the labour unrest, but could not forgive the communist and Russian inspiration.<sup>123</sup> After the Acting D.I.B. Isemonger's visit to Bombay and Calcutta in the last week of August, a general conspiracy case was proposed,<sup>124</sup> which ultimately led to the famous Meerut trial. On the positive side, two pieces of labour legislation,

121 Irwin to Birkenhead, 17 May 1928, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. IV, p. 103. Actually it was called Naujawan Bharat Sabha, the prominent members of which were Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan, Yash Pal, Sukh Deo, Jaya Chandra Vidyalankar, etc. See Shri Yash Pal, *Simhavalokan* (Hindi), vol. I for the story of the formation of the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army. Although Yashpal says that they had read Marx and Lenin and were much impressed by the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case and Bhagat Singh told the court that their objection was to end exploitation of man by man, the use of the word 'Socialist' was sentimental.

For Nehru's speeches and writings on the role of youth, see S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. IV, pp. 1-24. The Government of India was jittery enough to ask Bombay government to consider prosecution for his speech at Bombay Presidency Youth Conference in December

122 Dange was the leading light of Bombay textile strike as Spratt was of Bengal strikes. Irwin to Birkenhead, 13 June 1928, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. IV, p. 126, and D. Petrie to Cunningham, 11 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 168-70.

123 Irwin accuses Russia of sending money Irwin to Birkenhead, 17 May 1928, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 105. A telegraphic appeal of Mitra, the Secretary of E.I.R. Union, Spratt and Muzaffar Ahmad to Moscow for funds was published in the *Statesman*. Home Pol, File no. 18/IV, 1928.

124 Irwin to Birkenhead, 30 Aug. 1928, Halifax Coll., op. cit., p. 184. Isemonger decided to throw in Spratt and Bradley Same to same, 13 Sept. 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 200-01.

the Trade Unions Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, were to be brought up; on the preventive side, the Public Safety Bill. To get European votes for the Public Safety Bill, that on Trade Disputes had to be postponed. Patel killed the former by his famous casting vote, but it was later certified by the Governor General. The Bombay mill strike came to an end after the two sides agreed to the appointment of an inquiry committee. Differences between communist and non-communist trade union leaders weakened labour in 1929.

The young men carried on their fight for 'Independence' from Lucknow to Delhi A.I.C.C. (November 1928), which reaffirmed the Madras resolution. Srinivas Iyengar had formed with them an Independence for India League and paid lavishly for fares to ensure a majority at Delhi. Besant, Lajpat, Malaviya and even the President, Ansari, fought them. "Jawaharlal Nehru believes and has said that the value of the Independence Resolution to him is that it tends to develop a spirit in the people of this country which will force them to look ultimately for nothing less than complete freedom from British yoke. ... Srinivas Iyengar thinks that when India wants Independence England may be frightened into granting her at any rate Dominion Status. Liberals think that Dominion Status will put them in a position from which they can advance to independence if they so desire. They fear disruption."<sup>125</sup>

The battle royal took place at Calcutta Congress (1928) over which Nehru *père* presided. On 26 December Gandhi moved that the Congress adopt the Constitution drawn up by the Nehru Committee, "whilst adhering to the resolution relating to complete independence passed at Madras." The adoption would be conditional: "provided however that the Congress shall not be bound by the Constitution, if it is not accepted on or before the 31 December 1930 and provided further that in the event of non-acceptance by the British Parliament of the Constitution by that date the Congress will revive non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and every aid to the Government." This blowing of hot and cold through the same mouth was obviously to keep the young men quiet which they refused to do. Jawaharlal and Subhas moved amendments the aim of which was to put no time limit, nor even by implication, and not to send the text to the Viceroy as Gandhi had proposed. As in the past, Jawaharlal's emotional attachment got the better of logic. He toned down his amendment and Gandhi, on

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125 Coatman's note, encl. in Irwin to Peel, 15 Nov. 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 260-64.

his part, accepted changes, which were adopted in the Subjects Committee on 28 December. It now read : "Subject to the exigencies of the political situation this Congress will adopt the Constitution, if it is accepted in its entirety by the British Parliament on or before December 31, 1929 but in the event of its non-acceptance by that date or its earlier rejection, the Congress will organise a campaign of non-violent noncooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon" and that "nothing shall interfere with carrying on of propaganda for complete independence in Congress name". No mention of sending the text to the Viceroy was made.

Gandhi himself explained what was happening behind the scene—"the struggle between our own ranks" and the intention of both parties to avoid conflict. Jawaharlal was absent because he was not in sympathy even with the second draft but, "being high-souled, does not want to create unnecessary bitterness." Gandhi still considered his original resolution to be better, but, for unity's sake, he had to move "a resolution of compromise". "I could have defied them just as they could have defied me", said he, "but they say : 'we do not do it, because we want your service also, if we get them ; but not altogether at your price'. ... I could not possibly resist it without stultifying myself and without degrading myself."

As Gandhi moved the revised draft in the open session, he was heckled by the Bengal delegates. Subhas, who had kept quiet in the Subjects Committee because Jawahar had withdrawn, moved an amendment repudiating Dominion Status and reaffirming Independence. When some of the committed delegates tried to back out under his pressure, Gandhi gave them a piece of his mind, which could not savour the bitter dregs of compromise anymore. The resolution was passed. The ball was squarely in the British court.<sup>126</sup>

Though Irwin saw a "undoubtedly noticeable swing to the left", and his Home Secretary warned all local governments on 21 February 1929 to keep a watch on the younger men, Gandhi continued to be

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126 For Calcutta Congress, see C.W., vol. 38. The Youth Congress was held on 25-26 December which declared for complete independence. Jawaharlal was averse to accepting the Congress secretaryship but did so at the direction of the Independence for India League. Jawaharlal Nehru to P. N. Trivedi, 19 Jan. 1929, S. Gopal (ed.) *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. IV, p. 88.



conciliatory, as he irked under the constraint of the Young Turks, disliked their socialist stance and knew better than they that the country would take a much longer time to prepare. Vithalbhai Patel related to Irwin (11 January 1929) that Gandhi was in favour of British connection and would not make any difficulty about an accommodation of the Dominion Status idea by which foreign affairs, political affairs and, possibly, defence should be reserved in some manner to be defined. The time limit, he explained, was a mistake, but it was adopted to avoid a split. Patel advised Irwin to see Gandhi, Motilal and Sapru to which Irwin did not respond. The extremists in the Congress had frightened the Liberals and the Princes, and the All Parties Convention had failed to satisfy the Muslims. He could wait.<sup>127</sup> But he realised that the Congress needed a face-saving device.<sup>128</sup> "... I am sure we should be making a profound miscalculation and very potentially dangerous mistake if we were to drift into the easy position of saying that as they have made their beds so must they lie on them."<sup>129</sup>

On his own he saw Gandhi at Patel's garden party.<sup>130</sup> "The principal thread running through his (Gandhi's) thought was that the Constitution of India was a thing in the settlement of which she herself ought to have the predominant voice, Parliament subsequently ratifying what India had decided to ask for ... if such freedom of choice were left to Indians, we should be astonished by how much they would desire to leave in our hands through lack of self confidence."<sup>131</sup> This Irwin regarded as unpractical, and Patel and Motilal Nehru were both disappointed that Gandhi had not said anything which would make further parleys possible.<sup>132</sup> Sapru and the elder Nehru held secret talks with Simon through Grimwood Mears.<sup>133</sup>

Meanwhile, Gandhi was clearing the deck for action. "Make it your business", he exhorted Jawaharlal, "to put the Congress Committees in order ... the Congress must be a living thing."<sup>134</sup>

127 Irwin to Peel, Jan. 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol V, p. 2.

128 Same to same, 17 Jan. 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

129 Same to same, 24 Jan. 1929, *ibid.*, p. 22.

130 Same to same, 13 Feb. 1929, *ibid.*, p. 32.

131 Same to same, 21 Feb. 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 35-37.

132 Encl. of J. Coatman in same to same, 28 Feb. 1929, *ibid.*, p. 45.

133 Same to same, 4 April 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

134 Gandhi to J. Nehru, 1 Feb. 1929. For what the latter did, see S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Writings of J. Nehru*, op. cit., vol. IV, sec. 3 and *Jawaharlal Nehru A Biography*, vol. I, op. cit., pp. 122 et seq.

As the Congress inaugurated boycott of foreign cloth, repression was let loose on Congress volunteers for picketing sale of or burning of foreign cloth.<sup>135</sup> Gandhi himself was forced to give a bond for contravention of a local police law, when, at his meeting in a park at Calcutta, some people made a bonfire of foreign cloth.<sup>136</sup> Jawaharlal might have been implicated in the Meerut Conspiracy Case had not the Government been reluctant to push the nationalists into the arms of the communists. Members of the Working Committee and A.I.C.C. began to be arrested. Patel made capital out of this by his tussle with the Government over the Public Safety Bill, the motion to consider which he ruled out of order on 11 April.<sup>137</sup> Working class unrest (at Jamshedpur Gilmuri Tinsplate Workshop, Bombay textile mills, etc.) once again helped the national movement.<sup>138</sup> Gandhi made an extensive tour of U.P.

While continuing the policy of vigilance on volunteer activities,<sup>139</sup> Irwin went on negotiating directly with Jinnah<sup>140</sup> and, through Grimwood Mears, with Sapru and Motilal. The return of Labour to power in strength (June 1929) helped him to spell out his project for a Round Table Conference (before the final proposals were placed before Parliament) which would clearly state the objective of British rule in India.<sup>141</sup> He very well realised that a restatement of the Montagu declaration would not be enough, when a resolution for Independence had been passed at Madras, and, although watered down to Dominion Status at Calcutta, it still hang like a sword of Damocles on Indo-British relations. Gandhi persuaded Jawaharlal, against his wishes,<sup>142</sup> to become the president of the next session of the Congress, which gave enough indication that the sword might fall very soon.

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135 Home Secy. to all local governments, 21 Feb. 1929, Home Pol. F. 168 of 1929.

136 Irwin to Peel, 4 April 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. V, p. 79.

137 Ibid. pp. 89-98.

138 Jawaharlal Nehru, Note on the Gilmuri Tinsplate Workers' Strike (Sept. 1929), S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of J. Nehru*, op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 72-79. For Subhas Bose's trade union activities, see Home Pol. file no. 18/2/1930.

139 Home Secy. to all local governments, D. 342/29, dated 24 June 1929.

140 Irwin to Arthur Hirtzel, 30 May 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. V, p. 144.

141 Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 13 June 1929, *ibid.*

142 Jawaharlal Nehru to Gandhi, 13 July, 1929; same to Gandhi, tel., 21 Aug., 1929, same to Father, 30 Aug. 1929 and same to Shiva Prasad Gupta, 1 Oct. 1929, S. Gopal (ed.) *Selected Works of J. Nehru*, op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 156-61.

During the summer of 1929 Irwin persuaded the Home Government that, in order to win over Indian opinion, Dominion Status should be held up as the goal of constitutional progress in India. Baldwin wrote agreeing to this, provided the Simon Commission was consulted. Simon later complained that he was not consulted on this question. His commission might have found in favour of the restricted interpretation of 'responsible government' as given by Hailey in 1924. But since no body in India would accept such a finding, the government ignored Simon's warning and allowed the Viceroy to declare on 31 October 1929 that, in the judgement of H.M.G., "it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status." The declaration put the Congress on the horns of a dilemma, said Patel. "It was difficult for them to accept the offer in as much as the proposal did not recognise the claim they had for some time advanced for a Conference to discuss the details in application of a previously conceded principle of early Dominion Status (Gandhi's stand) ... the other horn of the dilemma was the extreme difficulty that it would be to Congress to reject the plan. The statement would certainly detach from Congress many who had been associated with it, and rejection would be likely to leave those who rejected isolated."<sup>143</sup> Patel wanted the conference in to be held in 1930 and its composition to be acceptable to the Congress. Irwin said it could not be held before 1931, though he would try to expedite, and advised Congress not to think itself to be the sole representative of India.

At the Delhi Conference of Leaders (1 November) Gandhi himself drafted the manifesto which offered conditional cooperation to evolve a Dominion Constitution for India and expressed belief that the R.T.C. would meet "not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established, but to frame a scheme of Dominion Constitution for India." Discipline was invoked to rope in an unwilling Jawaharlal, who had no desire to compromise on 'complete independence'. Irwin took a light view of the stiff-sounding resolution: "They all appreciate (our position) and I think honestly do not wish to be more embarrassing to us than is necessary to enable them to carry their left tail along with them."<sup>144</sup> Sapru read it the same way.<sup>145</sup>

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143 Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 31 Oct. 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. V, pp 151-52.

144 Same to same, 6 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*, p. 158.

145 Sapru to Irwin, 11 Nov. 1929, Sapru Papers.

But there were differences between Indians and Englishmen when they used the term Dominion Status. "To them (Indians) Dominion Status is much more a hall-mark of quality than the label of an achieved constitutional state." Irwin clearly told Patel "that there was no question of the Conference framing a scheme for Dominion Status or anything else. The purpose of the Conference was to make possible free discussion, in the course of which the government might fully inform itself of Indian opinion and the possibility of securing the maximum agreement for any proposals that, on its own responsibility, it would later have to submit to Parliament." Patel, on his part, warned Irwin that it was precisely on this the left might break away.<sup>146</sup>

"Jawaharlal the President-elect of the Congress, is very uncomfortable", reported the Viceroy, "and thinks he has sold his soul by signing the leaders' manifesto ...". The leaders rallied the moderate opinion, while keeping Jawaharlal, who in disgust had resigned both his membership and secretaryship after signing the Delhi manifesto, consoled that the Government would surely refuse to fulfil the conditions and he would have the opportunity to start civil disobedience.<sup>147</sup> We hear the exact echo of these words in Jawaharlal's letter to Reginald Bridgeman, Secretary to the British Committee of the League against Imperialism. The Young Turks raised the question of repression and demanded the release of all political prisoners and a dominant voice for the Congress in the selection of Indian representatives to R.T.C.

The atmosphere of reconciliation, was vitiated at this moment by the furore in England over Irwin's declaration. Reading and

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146 Note of an interview with Patel, 5 Nov. 1929 encl. Irwin to Wedgwood Benn. 6 Nov. 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. V, p. 161. He also told this to Gandhi and Motilal, "although they would feel bound in public to repudiate it." Same to same, 26 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*, p. 172.

147 Gandhi to J. Nehru, tel. 6 Nov., letter 18 Nov. 1929, C.W. 42, pp. 101 and 181. Ansari and Motilal joined Gandhi. Jawahar was so much pacified by 20 November that he thought all talk of R.T.C. was "mere eyewash and nothing will happen." J. Nehru to Frances J. Pratt, 20 Nov. 1929, S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of J. Nehru*, op. cit. vol. IV, p. 170. "The great redeeming feature", he wrote to Srinivasa Iyengar on the same day, "is the approach of the Congress which will automatically put an end to all such conferences and their activities." *Ibid.*, p. 171. He was keeping mum "because I want to make it very difficult for people to oppose independence at the Lahore Congress". Jawaharlal Nehru to Satyapal, 21 Nov. 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 173-74.

Birkenhead, responsible for the defeat of the Liberals and the Swarajists, once again took the lead in sabotaging Irwin and Gandhi.<sup>148</sup> The Labour Government had consulted but failed to get the previous consent of Sir John Simon and other political parties to such a declaration—a condition imposed by Reading and Baldwin.<sup>149</sup> Wedgwood Benn tried to stop the declaration at the last moment on Baldwin's request, but Irwin replied that it was too late.<sup>150</sup> Baldwin then informed the Government that the Conservative Party would not support the move. The result was an acrimonious debate in Parliament. The reports in the Press, the publication of Baldwin-Macdonald correspondence and Macdonald's weak defence raised misgivings about the intentions of H.M.G. even in the mind of Sapru.<sup>151</sup> Gandhi still believed in Irwin's sincerity. "Nevertheless he felt that the situation was such that the country expected that something should be done by the Government which would enable him to put the advanced section of his following consisting mostly of youngmen in a reasonable and helpful frame of mind." He wanted "a change of heart" to be manifested in the immediate consideration of Punjab conditions, release of prisoners and a liberal spirit in the actual administration of the provinces. Sapru advised a meeting between Irwin and Gandhi. Gandhi, he wrote, "is essentially a man of peace and would like his hands to be strengthened in dealing with his own following". Jinnah was of the same opinion.<sup>152</sup>

Irwin could not make up his mind partly because he genuinely thought that the Congress seemed "to be behaving with utter unreason" and partly in view of the differences within the Congress.<sup>153</sup> When he met Gandhi, Motilal, Sapru, Jinnah and Patel on 23 December, he pretended as if invitations had been sought. Standing

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148 For all papers on Irwin declaration of 31 Oct. 1929, see encl. Wedgwood Benn to Irwin, 14 Nov. 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. V, pp. 1-16. Also Parl. Deb. 1929-30, H.L., 5 Nov. 1929, vol. 75, pp. 372-88, 403-7; Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* pp. 45 et seq.

149 Viscount Simon, *Retrospect* (London, 1952), pp. 152-53; K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin* (London, 1969), p. 537.

150 Wedgwood Benn's tel., 29 Oct. 1929; Irwin's reply, same date.

151 Sapru to Graham Pole, 10 Oct. 1929, Sapru Papers; Sapru to Irwin, 25 Nov. 1929 encl. in Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 3 Dec. 1929, Halifax Coll. op. cit. vol. V. p. 176.

152 Jinnah to Irwin, 3 Dec. 1929, Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Jinnah-Irwin Correspondence 1927-1930* (Lahore, 1969), pp. 29-30.

153 Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 12 Dec. 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. V, pp. 178-79.

too firmly on the prestige of the Raj, he hurt the *amour propre* of Motilal who did not like to meet Irwin in a crowd.<sup>154</sup> The meeting was destined to be infructuous. "They really were very impossible", commented Irwin. He failed to give the Congress a pledge that the purpose of the R.T.C. would be to consider the details of a Dominion constitution.<sup>155</sup>

Motilal was now moving with his son, who had revolted against the very idea of R.T.C. as president of the All India Trade Union Congress at Nagpur (30 November). Shiva Rao's secret report of the A.I.T.U.C. meeting (31 December 1929) makes it clear that the Third International's manipulations through the G.I.P.R. Union and Girni Kamgar Union had split that body into two, and Jawaharlal was allying with the communists. If Motilal and Gandhi had pressed further for a policy of reconciliation, the Congress would have been split and Jawaharlal and Subhas would have gone out with their radical followers. As Sapru informed Irwin, Gandhi was obliged ". . . to put the advanced of his following consisting mostly of youngmen in a reasonable and hopeful frame of mind."<sup>156</sup> In Gandhi's list of priority unity of the Congress was uppermost. From his own point of view he saw the necessity of a break with Irwin. He apprehended outbreak of popular violence from workers and peasants and wanted to channelise it and control it.<sup>157</sup> He would not listen to any counsel of moderation from Sapru, Patel, Ansari or Malaviya. Detecting the influence of youth, Jinnah kept away. The parting of the ways from the liberals as well as Raj had to come, for, without it, Gandhi would have risked his leadership.

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154 Same to same, 19 Dec. 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 184-85; Motilal Nehru to V. J. Patel, 9 Dec. 1929, quoted in G. I. Patel, *Vithalbhai Patel, Life and Times*, Bk. II (Bombay, 1951), p. 107G.

155 G. Cunningham to Sapru, 27 Dec. 1929, 16 Jan. 1930, encl. minute of the meeting with leaders (23 Dec. 1929), Sapru Papers. Tel. 365 from Viceroy to Secy. of State, 24 Dec. 1929.

156 Sapru to Irwin, 25 Nov. 1929, Halifax Coll., vol. V, p. 176

157 For the incident of bomb-throwing in the Legislative Assembly in protest against G.G.'s certification of Public Safety Bill and Trades Disputes Bill and 'murder' of Lajpat Rai (the work of Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Datta of H.S.R.A.) and the discovery of bomb factories at Lahore and Saharanpur, see Yashpal, *op. cit.*, p. 185; Manmatha Nath Gupta, *History of the Revolutionary Movement in India*, pp. 268 et seq. Jatindra Nath Das was arrested later and, while in prison, undertook a fast unto death. Others were tried by a special tribunal which sentenced Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev to death on 7 Oct. 1930. Militant working class movement and peasant unrest in U.P. also caused concern.

Gandhi prefaced the key resolution at Lahore Congress (1929) with a gracious congratulation to Irwin for his narrow escape from the hand of a terrorist.<sup>158</sup> His resolution, criticising the attempt to blow off the Viceregal train as dastardly and cowardly, could be passed only by 81 votes and that on the threat of his leaving the Congress. While moving into battle position, he still justified the open door to negotiation. He talked of 'partnership' and 'a change of heart' and, as late as February 1930, he "caused some concern to his followers by emitting a series of practical points on which . . . compromise with the Congress would be possible."<sup>159</sup> Irwin made the mistake of regarding him to be a prisoner of the Young Party and his points "too impractical." The Working Committee (14-16 Feb. 1930) authorised Gandhi to start civil disobedience as and when he chose. Irwin could not realise at all how Gandhi would make salt a *casus belli*. "At present", he writes blithely on 20 February, 1930, "the prospect of a salt campaign does not keep me awake at night . . ."<sup>160</sup> He should have kept awake, pondering on its importance on the eve of the French Revolution. When the lone and 'half-naked *fakir*' with his long staff started on his Dandee march, India acknowledged in him the undisputed leader to freedom.<sup>161</sup>

[ Concluded ]

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158 Shri Yashpal attempted to blow off the Viceregal train on the morning of 23 November 1929 but the Viceroy escaped. Shri Yashpal, op. cit. vol. II, pp. 129-38.

159 Irwin to Wedgwood Benn, 6 Feb. 1929, Halifax Coll., op. cit., vol. VI, p. 29.

160 Same to same, 20 Feb. 1930, *ibid.*, p. 36.

161 Though Irwin was sceptical, he mentions that many people would be inclined to call Gandhi's ultimatum "a sincere cry from the heart of an earnest servant of the toiling millions . . ." Same to same, 6 March 1930, *ibid.*, p. 47. For the next part of the campaign, see Jawaharlal Nehru's Circular to P.C.C.s., 22 Feb. 1930, A.I.C.C., File no. P-1/1930, pp. 113-19.

## NATTUKOTTAI CHETTIARS IN THE ECONOMY OF SRI LANKA

HARAPRASAD CHATTOPADHYAYA

Immigration of the Tamil labourers into Sri Lanka in the 19th and early 20th centuries not only solved the British planters' problem of securing efficient, yet cheap, labour for their plantations but also created opportunities for the investment of Indian capital in the trade and industry of the Island. Though the British occupation of Sri Lanka in 1815 was followed by the introduction of plantation economy there, the British capitalists, who invested their capital in plantations, were initially put to great inconvenience for want of banking facilities in the country where the first commercial bank came to be established only in 1841. This want of banks in the early days of British rule in Sri Lanka created a splendid opportunity for the Chettiar capitalists of South India to establish themselves in the Island as the only Bankers to the British capitalists there prior to 1841. The introduction of plantation, again, gave a death-blow to the primitive peasant economy of the Island by requiring rice-fields to be converted into the plantations of coffee, tea, rubber cacao, coconut and cardamom. As the indigenous produce of rice, the staple food of the Ceylonese, consequently fell far short of their requirements, it had to be imported from abroad. This gave additional urge to the Nattukottai Chettiars to appear in the Ceylonese market as the suppliers of rice, too. The trail blazed by the labourers, therefore, attracted the Nattukottai Chettiars to the promising markets of Sri Lanka, and it was not long before their rank was swelled by the 'mudlalis' (merchants) from western India and by those whose occupation it was to run small shops and who were popularly known as boutique-keepers.

The original home of the Nattukottai Chettiars<sup>1</sup> was the Chola

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<sup>1</sup> According to Madras District Gazetteer, Madurai, edited by B. S. Baliga (p. 110), it is doubtful whether the word Nattukottai is a corruption of Nattarasan-Kottai, the name of a small village near Sivaganga, the word being derived, it would appear, from Nattukottai or country fort. As to the origin of the word Chetty, it is derived from the Sanskrit shreshthi or the head of



country in South India. They abandoned the Chola territory<sup>2</sup> about 700 A.D. in search of a new home and ultimately settled in 78 villages occupying an irregular area called Chettinad, bounded on the north by the Vellayar river in the Pudukottai state, on the south by the Vaigai river, on the west by the Piranmalai (a mountain peak) and on the east by the Bay of Bengal. Chettinad thus lies partly in the Ramnad district and partly in the Pudukottai state. Out of the 78 villages occupied by the Nattukottai Chettiars, 20 are in the Pudukottai state and 58, in the Ramnad district.<sup>3</sup> Their business spread all over Southern India and even travelled beyond India to such countries as Burma, Malaya, Vietnam, Thailand, Java, Sumatra, Mauritius and Sri Lanka.<sup>4</sup> The Nattukottai Chettiars set up their business in Calcutta also, as borne out by A. Savarinatha Pillai, a former Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax, Southern Range, Madras, in his written evidence before the Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930. According to his evidence, there had been from 'olden times' till 1910 Chetty shops in Calcutta which later on used to receive only deposits from Bengalis but their business in Calcutta sustained a severe shock between 1908 and 1912 when 7 or 8 of their shops collapsed, with the result that they were no longer able to do further business in Bengal.<sup>5</sup> The community of the Nattukottai Chettiars was, indeed, 'mobile in operations and locale, and its business combined banking with trading, changing from trade to money-lending or from one business to another and moving from place to place whichever offered better chances of profit.'<sup>6</sup>

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a merchant-guild. The Nattukottai Chettiars are also called Nagarathars or town-dwellers from their being grouped into 9 Nagarams or 9 temple-townships for social purposes, each such township having its own community of worshippers.

2 The Nattukottai Chettiars were compelled to abandon the Chola country, according to Tamil Nadu District Gazetteer, Ramanathapuram, edited by A. Ramaswami (1972), because the Chola king began to persecute them when they refused to give their daughters in marriage to him (p. 146). According to another version, the Nattukottai Chettiars incurred the displeasure of the Chola king by flouting his orders that they should join others in protecting the capital city from the flood of the Kavery. The Chola king subjected them to a series of punishments and finally expelled them from the chola country. (circa 700 A.D.) *Vide* Weerasooria—The Nattukottai Chettiar, p. 3.

3 Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, vol. III, 1930, p. 1170

4 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXII, 1934—Ceylon Banking Commission Report, Vol. I, Para. 160, p. 40.

5 Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, Vol III, op. cit., p. 1170.

6 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXII, 1934, op cit, Para. 160, p. 40,

The Nattukottai Chettiers had given a good account of themselves as bankers in Sri Lanka before the introduction regular banking system there. The British merchants in Sri Lanka were then wholly dependent on them for the conversion of their Sterling bills into Indian rupees. They used to export coffee to Europe and to receive payment in Sterling bills in return. They also carried on business with India. The difficulty they faced was how to meet their financial obligations in Sri Lanka and how to clear their dues on account of their imports from India. The question of such payments posed a problem to them in view of the fact that payments in India were to be made in rupees, so also in Sri Lanka—Sri Lanka having then no currency of her own, Indian currency being in circulation there—whereas they had only Sterling bills in their possession. The exchange problem of the British merchant houses in the early period of British rule was, in other words, the problem of meeting their trade deficit with India on account of their Indian imports, out of their Sterling receipts obtained on account of their exports to England and other western countries.<sup>7</sup> What was needed was the conversion of their Sterling bills into Rupee ones. This conversion was possible either through the Chettiers, who were then the only dealers in rupees in Sri Lanka, or by adopting the method of discounting the Sterling bills in London, importing the gold bullion into India, getting the gold bullion minted there into rupee coins in exchange and then shipping the rupee coins to Sri Lanka.<sup>8</sup> The latter alternative method was, no doubt, circuitous and was very likely to involve long delay in the conversion of Sterling bills. The British merchants, in such circumstances, preferred the former alternative or the method of conversion through the Nattukottai Chettiers. The British merchants were, therefore, obliged to engage in the Presidency towns in India their own Agents to one of whom, for instance, they sent, by post, the Sterling bills to get them discounted through an Indian bank. The Agent concerned, on receipt of the Sterling bills, got them converted into Rupee bills through a commercial bank in Bombay, Madras or Calcutta and then presented the same to a Nattukottai Chettiar Firm for encashment in Indian rupees. The Chettiar Firm forthwith bought the Rupee bills on a Madras, Bombay or Calcutta commercial bank, as the case might be, paid the amount due in Indian coins to the Agent concerned for ultimate delivery to the British merchant or

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7 H.A. de S. Gunasekera—From dependent currency to Central Banking in Ceylon, p. 23.

8 B. R. Senoy—Ceylon Currency and Banking, p. 91.

merchants in Sri Lanka. The Chettiar Firm in question, thereafter, conveniently got the Rupee bills discounted at the commercial bank which issued them, no doubt with a margin of profit accruing from the transaction. The commercial bank on its part finally realised the money due on the Sterling bills by getting them discounted at a London bank with which the British merchant or merchants in Sri Lanka had their accounts. Thus the smooth movement of the wheel of exchange depended largely on the disposition of the Nattukottai Chettiar merchant-bankers. They could compel the holders of Sterling credits to convert them first into Rupee bills before they would be willing to negotiate them. In discounting bills for the foreign merchants, however, the Chettians showed a marked preference for Government bills.<sup>9</sup>

The banking business of the Nattukottai Chettians took a new turn after the establishment, in 1841, of the first commercial bank in the Island, the Bank of Ceylon, which was entirely a British concern. The Bank, however, failed in 1848. Gradually other British banks made their appearance in Sri Lanka—the Mercantile Bank of India, the Oriental Banking Corporation, the Chartered Bank, the Bank of Madras. The establishment of these British banks, especially the establishment of the Bank of Madras (now called the State Bank of India), made the British Business Houses in Sri Lanka independent of the Chettiar Firms as they could now transact their banking business through the above-mentioned British banks, with the result that the importance of the Chettiar Firms in the credit and financial structure of the Island gradually declined. The Ceylonese agriculturists and traders who needed loan were, therefore, required, in the changed circumstances, to apply to the British banks for financial aid. The Ceylonese, however, experienced much difficulty in gaining an easy access to the European staff of the British banks for the purpose of obtaining loan. Their difficulty was enhanced by the obligation that they must apply for their loan through an officer, called shroff, who was appointed by a bank from among the Colombo Chetties to act as a guarantor for the non-European borrowers. A shroff was not, however, a pukka officer of a bank on a footing of equality with other staff officers. A bank purchased his experience of the local market by appointing him on a fixed pay plus a certain commission on non-European business. He earned an additional commission ranging from 1/8 per cent to 1/2 per

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<sup>9</sup> Gunasekera—From dependent currency to Central Banking in Ceylon, op. cit., p. 23.

cent from his own clients.<sup>10</sup> Thus a shroff enjoyed commission from both the bank and the borrower. The obligation to pay commission on the sanctioned loan imposed an additional financial burden on the local traders. The local non-European traders had, in the majority of cases, no direct contact with the Bank Manager under such a system, though such a contact was necessary for mutual understanding and was helpful to the grant of credit facilities. Moreover, a shroff often prevailed upon his clients to inflate their credit and thus to overtrade, in order to enhance his personal remuneration.

Such defects in the system of shroffs could not escape the notice of the Nattukottai Chettiars. They further found that the newly established exchange banks were principally concerned with the financing of the foreign trade of the Island and took little or no interest in financing local trade or the trade in the Ceylonese hands. Whatever pittance of financial aid the Ceylonese traders could get from the banks was made available to them through the persuasive efforts of the shroffs on payment of a certain percentage of commission to them. The Chettiars had meanwhile lost their banking business with the British merchants to the commercial banks like the Bank of Madras and others, mentioned above. Developments such as these determined the future line of action of the Nattukottai Chettiars as business men who accordingly gave their banking business a new shape by resorting to the policy of borrowing money from the British banks through the shroffs as their middlemen and then re-lending the money so borrowed to the Ceylonese at higher rates of interest. The Ceylon Banking Commission of 1934 estimated the Chettiars' total loan from the British banks at 25 million rupees until that year.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, then, to the Ceylonese business men and agriculturists, the Nattukottai Chettiars still functioned as the local bankers, as before. To them the Chettiars still continued to be the main source of credit, through as intermediaries between the banks and the indigenous demand for loan. As local bankers doing business as middlemen to the British banks, the Chettiars were highly popular with their customers, not without reasons. An attractive feature of the Chettiars' banking system was that they lived among the borrowers themselves, keeping a strict watch over the financial stability of

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10 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXIII, 1934. Ceylon Banking Commission Vol. II. Evidence of Indian Mercantile Chamber of Ceylon, Colombo.

11 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXII, 1934—Ceylon Banking Commission, Vol. I, *op cit.*, Para. 169, p. 42.

the latter. Unlike the manager and the staff of the British banks, they were easily approachable by the borrowers. The facility of direct access to the Chettiar bankers and the advantage of direct communication with them removed the scope of a misunderstanding between them through mutual appreciation and smooth financial transaction. The Chettiar bankers also successfully dispensed with departmentalism and red-tapism and thus ensured financial accommodation without much loss of time. Their banking method was elastic and, therefore, adjustable to the changing situation and the needs of the customers. If the British bankers met the financial needs of only the importers and exporters, the Chettiars had their primary interest in financing private enterprises of the Ceylonese business men and agriculturists. The Nattukottai Chettiars' name was, indeed, synonymous with private banking.<sup>12</sup>

All the Nattukottai Chettiars trading in Sri Lanka were members of the Ceylon Nattukottai Chettiars' Association which was founded about the year 1927. The membership of the Association was confined to the community of the Nattukottai Chettiars only. The Association determined from time to time the problems concerning their business and fixed the minimum rate of interest chargeable on their borrowers.<sup>13</sup> Their banking business was organized on the joint-family basis.<sup>14</sup> The members of a family lived together, worked together and had a common mess. The profits went to the common fund. As in Rangoon, Singapur and other centres of their business, so in Colombo, they lived in the same locality and even had their offices in the same building.<sup>15</sup>

As in their other business centres, so in Sri Lanka, the Nattukottai Chettiars carried on their business chiefly through the Agency system. The Agent, who must be a member of the community of the Nattukottai Chettiars, was the pivot of the Chettiar organization. He was appointed for a three-year term with full powers to transact all matters connected with the Principal's business in Sri Lanka. In transacting business on behalf of a Firm, an Agent followed the

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12 Ibid., Para. 159.

13 Ibid., Para. 165, p. 41. The Association is currently known as the Chettiar Chamber of Commerce, located at Sea Street, Colombo 11. Vide Weerasooria—The Nattukottai Chettiar, Merchant Bankers in Ceylon, p. 158.

14 V. Krishnan—The Indigenous Banking in South India, p. 33.

15 Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar Commemoration Volume—P. J. Thomas, Nattukottai Chettiars—Their Banking System, pp. 840-854.

peculiar style of signing papers by prefixing to his own name the initials of the persons who constituted the Firm. Such a style of signature was known as Vilasam.<sup>16</sup> The Agent's salary was fixed for the entire period, only a part of it being paid to him in advance. He was rewarded with a bonus amounting to 10 per cent of the net profits generally, at the expiry of his term of office, if he proved himself energetic and industrious during his tenure of service. Relieved of his duties at the end of his term of office, the Agent returned to Madras for rest for three years, after giving an account of his stewardship to his Principal. He could seek reemployment, after spending three years in rest, under his old Principal or under a new one. In course of time, such Agents could amass enough wealth for starting a business of their own. The Agency system 'enabled the Nattukottai Chettiars to bring down their overhead charges to a low level, while it encouraged honesty and devotion to work by the system of payment by results.'<sup>17</sup>

What were the sources of capital of the Nattukottai Chettiars in Sri Lanka? Their capital was principally made up of their own funds and of the loans they obtained from the banks in Sri Lanka and from their relatives in India. About 1925 the Chettiars' business in Sri Lanka was valued at about 15 crores of rupees out of which 8½ crores represented their own capital, 4 crores was borrowed from their relatives and friends in South India and the remaining 2½ crores represented their loan from the local banks.<sup>18</sup> By 1934, the Chettiar capital was reduced to about 10 crores the sources of which were as follows<sup>19</sup> :

|                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| The Chettiars' own capital | Rs. 8,50,00,000 (approximate) |
| Amount borrowed from       |                               |
| relations in India         | Rs. 1.40,00,000     ,,        |
| Amount borrowed from local |                               |
| banks                      | Rs. 10,00,000     ,,          |
|                            | <hr/>                         |
|                            | Rs. 10,00,00,000     ,,       |
|                            | <hr/>                         |

16 Vide Weerasooria, op. cit., Chap. V.

17 The Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 1172.

18 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXIII of 1934—Ceylon Banking Commission, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 67. Evidence of P.R.S. Chettiar, Secretary of the Ceylon Nattukottai Chettiars' Association.

19 Ceylon Banking Commission, Vol. I, Para. 168, p. 42.

The Chettians borrowed money from the local banks by means of overdrafts, promissory notes and time notes. Most of the Chettians' dealings with the banks had been on time notes. The loans were usually for one or two months but were renewable. The special rate of interest at which loans were sanctioned by the banks to the Chettians were commonly known in the business circle in Colombo as the 'Chetty rate'. It was about 2 to 3 per cent more than the normal bank rate which varied from 5 to 6 per cent in those days. The bulk of the Chetty loans was provided by the Colombo branch of the Imperial Bank of India. Whenever financially solvent parties approached the Bank for loan, it was granted forthwith on joint signatures. No security was demanded but the loan had to be guaranteed by the bank's shroff. The system worked well till about 1925 when a crisis, called the 'Chetty crisis', paralysed the banking business of the Nattukottai Chettians in Sri Lanka. The crisis arose out of the malpractices of some leading Chettian Firms in obtaining loan and financial accommodation from banks. The banks which loaned money to them, therefore, took alarm, suspended further credit to them except on good security, say Government paper, and thus tightened their lending policies towards the Chettian Firms, with the result that the amount of loans from banks to the Chettians dropped from 2½ crores or 25 million rupees in 1925 to 10 lakhs or 1 million rupees in 1934, as stated above.

Normally, before the Chetty crisis of 1925, the Nattukottai Chettians in Sri Lanka did not borrow beyond their capacity of repaying and followed their traditional practice of inter-Chetty lending. These two factors, particularly the second one, contributed much to the early success of their business. When a Chettian trader was in need of liquid funds, he got the same from another Chettian trader at the usual inter-Chetty rate of interest of 6 per cent or at a rate below 6 per cent or at the prevailing Bank rate, whichever was higher. A Chettian trader in need of short-term credit, therefore, found no difficulty in obtaining the same from another solvent Chettian. Thus, the Chetty traders could meet their financial requirements with mutual help, and the wheels of the Chettian banking business could roll on without a creak. This state of things came to be rudely disturbed by the development of the aforesaid Chetty crisis of 1925. Almost upon its heels came the world-wide economic crisis of the 1930's the ruinous repercussions of which did not obviously leave the Chettian business men, whether in Sri Lanka or in Burma or elsewhere, untouched or unaffected. So far as the Chettian business men in Sri Lanka were concerned, with the fall in the prices of cocoanut and rubber beyond

their production costs, with the restrictive credit-policy of the British banks and with the non-recovery of their money lent to the Ceylonese farmers and traders, they (Nattukottai Chettiers) confronted a crisis too deep to overcome.

According to the memorandum of the Ceylon Nattukottai Chettiers' Association, Colombo, published in Volume II of the Ceylon Banking Commission Report, 1934, the Nattukottai Chettiers carried on their business in Sri Lanka through about 556 Chettiar Firms out of which 450 were the principal ones, which invested their capital amounting to about 10 crores of rupees partly in business and properties, partly in loans and advances and partly as bank deposits, as detailed below<sup>20</sup> :

(A) Business and properties

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| (1) Investment in about 50,000 acres of agricultural land and estates—70 p.c. coconut, 15 p.c. rubber and 15 p.c. tea, cocoa, etc. | Rs. 3,00,00,000 |
|--|-----------------|

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| (2) Investment in the purchase of house-properties in principal towns | Rs. 60,00,000 |
|---|---------------|

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| (3) Investment as business-capital in retail shops, estate-supplies, rice-trade, import-business etc | Rs. 1,00,00,000 |
|--|-----------------|

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Total (A) | Rs. 4,60,00,000 |
|-----------|-----------------|

(B) Loans and Advances

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| (4) Investment in pawnbroking advances | Rs. 40,00,000 |
|--|---------------|

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| (5) Investment in mortgages | Rs. 2,00,00,000 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| (6) Investment in promissory notes etc. | Rs. 2,50,00,000 |
|---|-----------------|

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Total (B) | Rs. 4,90,00,000 |
|-----------|-----------------|

|                       |           |               |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------------|
| (C) Deposits in banks | Total (C) | Rs. 50,00,000 |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------------|

|             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| GRAND TOTAL | Rs. 10 crores |
|-------------|---------------|

Considering the above investments from the point of view of their realizable value, P.R.S. Chettiar, Secretary of the Nattukottai Chettiers Association, observed in his memorandum of the Ceylon Banking

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Paras, 166 & 167, pp. 41-42. Also Ceylon Banking Commission, Vol. II, Memoranda and Evidence, pp 66, op. cit.



Commission of 1934 : There was no fear of realizing the 50 lakhs deposited in the Ceylon banks ; of the sum of 1 crore of rupees invested in retail shops and other trades, 80 p.c. might be realizable ; the 60 lakhs invested in town properties might be realized according to the current prices of property ; in regard to the 40 lakhs invested in pawnbroking advances, there might be a depreciation of the securities in the hands of pawnbrokers, if the price of gold fell, and, therefore, 10 p.c. of their investments might be unrealizable ; in view of the ruling prices of cocoanut and other estates, 50 p.c. of the 3 crores of rupees invested in the purchase of estates would have to be written off as unrealizable, and a similar 50 p.c. of the  $4\frac{1}{2}$  crores of rupees invested in mortgages and liquid securities might not be realized. Thus the Secretary of the Association came to estimate the value of the unrealizable Chettiar investments in Sri Lanka at about 4 crores of rupees.<sup>21</sup>

The Chettiar Firms were established in different parts of Sri Lanka, their number in Colombo, however, being comparatively large, as would be evident from their distribution throughout the Island : Colombo and its suburbs—180 + 20, Negombo—84, Kandy—50, Gampola—22, Galle—21, Madampe—18, Matale—17, Puttalam—16, Nawalapitiya—11, Kurunegala, Badulla and Jaffna and Kochchikade—10 each, Pussellawa—8, Kegalla and Hingula—7 each, Balangoda and Narammala—6 each, Ratnapura, Talawakale and Bandarawela—5 each, Matara, Batticaloa and Dikoya—4 each, Ambalangoda—3, Rakwana, Anuradhapura and Passara—2 each, Puwakpitiya, Dehiowita, Yatiyantota, Parakaduwa, Kahawatta, Nattandiya and Polgahawela—1 each.<sup>22</sup>

The activities of the Nattukottai Chettiars in Sri Lanka were obviously concentrated mostly in Colombo and were essentially connected with the banking and money-lending business. They financed the Ceylonese traders and agriculturists. They also acted as pawnbrokers, lending money, with interest charged on it, on the security of jewellery or other articles pledged in their keeping. Pawnbroking was done in Sri Lanka by the Ceylonese as well. On a rough calculation, according to the evidence of P.R.S. Chettiar,<sup>23</sup> there were

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21 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXIII, 1934, op. cit.

22 Ibid.

23 Secretary, Nattukottai Chettiars' Association. Vide his memorandum before the Ceylon Banking Commission. Ceylon Sessional Paper XXVIII—1934.

about 100 Chettians in Sri Lanka doing pawnbroking either as a main business or as a subsidiary one, their investment in the pawnbroking business being about 4 million rupees, as stated above. The total credit granted by all the pawnbrokers in Sri Lanka, Chettians and Ceylonese taken together, was estimated at 10 million rupees.<sup>24</sup> Every pawnbroker was required to take out a yearly licence from the Government Agent or his Assistant under whose territorial jurisdiction he resided, and every pledge was redeemable within 12 months. If the amount of advance was Rs. 5 and the article in pawn was not redeemed within a year and 7 days of grace, it became the pawnbroker's absolute property. For higher advances, the articles pledged, if unredeemed within the prescribed time-limit, could be disposed of by sale by public auction. As regards the rate of interest charged by the pawnbroker, if the amount of loan was Rs. 20 or below, he could not claim more than 2 cents per rupee per month but, when the loan was higher, the rate of interest was reduced to 2 cents per month for every sum of one rupee and 5 cents. In addition to interest, a pawnbroker could charge a fee of 4 cents for a pawn-ticket, which was reduced to 2 cents if the loan was for Rs. 5 or below. The Chettian pawnbroker was required to exhibit these particulars of information in different languages—English, Sinhalese, and Tamil—at a conspicuous part of his shop.

Scattered throughout the country are the boutique-keepers whose financiers were the Nattukottai Chettians during the hey day of their business there. It is to the boutique-keepers that the cultivators must repair for the supply of seeds and foodstuffs, and it is to them that crops must be taken for sale. The estate labourers and the rural folk must likewise resort to the boutique-keepers to obtain loans and to buy the necessities of daily life on credit from them, the credit being repaid on getting their wages or after harvesting their crops. There was no taking of bonds or promissory notes, the credit being based on the personal knowledge of the borrower. Very rarely was there a deliberate default in spite of the want of the borrower's signature. The boutique-keepers, thus so very indispensable to the cultivators, estate labourers and the rural folk alike, were debtors to the Nattukottai Chettians who charged 12 to 15 per cent interest on the credit facilities given to them.<sup>25</sup>

The Nattukottai Chettians also invested their capital in land in Sri Lanka. As already stated, they owned 50,000 acres of agricul-

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24 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXII, 1934, op. cit., Para. 183, p. 46.

tural land of which 70 per cent represented cocoanut estates, 15 per cent, rubber estates, and the remaining 15 per cent, tea and cocoa estates. They had their investments also in house-properties in principal towns, in mortgages, in retail shops and in rice-trade, as stated above. The import of rice and other foodstuffs had all along been in the Chettiar hands. On the whole, initially the proportion of the import trade in the hands of the Ceylonese was negligibly small but it gradually increased with the shrinking of the Chettiars' trade.<sup>26</sup> Just as the Nattukottai Chettiars imported rice to Sri Lanka, where it was scarce, from India and Burma, where it was procurable in abundance, so did they import rupees from India, where they circulated in abundance, to the Island, where they were scarce, though indispensably required for financial transactions, as discussed above. Indian currency notes of denominations lower than five rupees were not also available in Sri Lanka. But small payments to be made to the agricultural and estate labourers required the circulation of silver rupees or one-rupee currency notes in the Island. Again, of the two media of exchange preference was, for obvious reasons, given to the former. Small payments to labourers and artisans could be made and the entire minor business of the country could be transacted though silver alone. Gold was considered absolutely unsuitable for the purpose because of its units being of much higher value. Sri Lanka, therefore, needed silver rupees which the Nattukottai Chettiars imported from their own country. The cheapest mode of import was by native vessels, the shipment charge of a bag of 2,000 rupees being only about 2 rupees<sup>27</sup>. The imported silver rupees were sold by the Nattukottai Chettiars to the British planters and British business-houses with a good margin of profit. And all this before the establishment of British commercial banks in Sri Lanka. Thereafter, the Nattukottai Chettiars switched over to money-lending as their principal occupation in the country. They brought into Sri Lanka enough capital of their own. They utilized their credit facilities with the British exchange banks to the fullest extent. They re-loaned the loan they took from British banks, which was to the tune of 25 million rupees, on a short-time basis, and also lent their own capital, on a long-term basis, to finance the Ceylonese exporters and importers, retail-traders, pawnbrokers, farmers, estate-owners, cocoanut-millers and arrack-dealers, seeking

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25 Ibid., Paras. 198-99, 203.

26 Gunasekera—From dependent currency to Central Banking in Ceylon, op. cit., p. 192.

27 Ibid., p. 134.

their financial aid, all of whom had at one time or another to solicit and obtain financial accommodation from them. Thus Sri Lanka owed a great deal to the Nattukottai Chettiars for her economic development as did Burma, Malaya and the former French Indo-China in the colonial epoch. Burma was then the chief centre of the Chetti money-lending operations. There were Chetti shops in the interior-most villages of the province, Kattukadais, as they were called, where the customers were mainly agriculturists. Loans were issued to them on pro-notes, called Vennalai documents, and on mortgage bonds, at the rates of interest varying from 12 to 15, 18 and 24 per cent.<sup>28</sup> Money-lending flourished in Burma during the cultivation season from September to March. Loans were repaid with interest due thereon by the agriculturists by selling their produce of paddy and rice when their prices showed an upward tendency. About 50 per cent of the produce went to the Nattukottai Chettiars by way of repayment of the loans made by them. In Rangoon itself, the Chettiars' money-lending business involved an investment of over 5 crores of rupees. Money-advances were made not only to the agriculturists but also to the traders, the owners of rice-mills and to others requiring financial accommodation. In the Federated Malay States, money was advanced on the security of rubber gardens, house-properties, tin-mines, and on the share certificates of Companies. The money-lending business in the Federated Malay States flourished not for the fraction of a year as in Burma but was fairly continuous throughout a year, the rate of interest ranging from 12 to 36 per cent.<sup>29</sup> In French Indo-China, loans were similarly advanced by the Nattukottai Chettiars to the agriculturists, rubber-garden owners and to the importers and exporters of goods in the seaport towns.<sup>30</sup>

The accusations normally laid at the door of the Nattukottai Chettiars as money-lenders in Sri Lanka are, according to the evidences before the Ceylon Banking Commission, 1934, the following :<sup>31</sup>

(1) In order to overcome the stipulations of interest in the Money-lenders' Ordinance, applicable to all money-lenders, the Nattukottai Chettiars resorted to the practice of compelling the borrowers to make fictitious entries in promissory notes and other documents of

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<sup>28</sup> Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, Vol. III, pp. 1176-1177.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ceylon Sessional Paper XXII, 1934—Ceylon Banking Commission, Vol. I, op. cit., Para. 174, pp. 43-44.

debt, so that, on the face of it, the transactions might appear to be "within the four corners of law", though, in reality, they might have illegally greater return of interest. (2) Their policy of deducting interest in advance and of recovering the balance of the loan in instalments without allowing any rebate on the interest, deducted in advance, actually led to the realization of more interest than was due from the borrowers. (3) The rate of interest ( $13\frac{1}{2}$  per cent per annum), charged by the Chettiars, was high. (4) The liquidation of debt by the acquisition of the borrower's properties led to the transfer of lands and buildings from the Ceylonese people to the non-Ceylonese. (5) Many borrowers whose lands and estates were thus sold in satisfaction of their debts were deprived of their hearth and home and the means of their livelihood, too. (6) The Chettiars' profits on their business led to a drain of wealth from Sri Lanka to India.

On a careful examination of the above accusations, the Commission offered the following comments:<sup>32</sup> The first three charges were of a general character and could hold good in the case of almost every other money-lender. It should, however, be said in all fairness to the Chettiars that their actions were cleaner than those of the ordinary class of money-lenders. Except perhaps with the object of getting more interest than what the law allowed them, they did not obtain fictitious documents or resort to the practice of making false entries in promissory notes or accounts. As regards the accusation that the Chettiars acquired borrowers' properties in satisfaction of their debt, the Commission held, on the strength of the unanimity of evidence, that the Chettiars were not at all anxious for acquiring properties by way of exchanging their mantle of bankers for that of landlords. Their ideal business was to deal in cash and cash obligations. It was against the very spirit of their business that they should lock up their funds in lands and buildings. Whatever estates they bought they were prepared to part with even at a loss. The Commission's conclusion was that the Chettiar creditors were forced to take over the properties of the borrowers when they found that the latter, without repaying their debts or coming to some reasonable understanding with them, evaded them and, at times, even adopted a threatening attitude. As regards the drain of wealth from Sri Lanka through the Chettiars' profits in business, the Commission held that there was no real drain: 'If they had a continuous run of good luck and did'

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32 Ibid., Paras. 175-181, pp. 44-46.

not reinvest their profits, we would say that it was so, but their losses through depression and buying of properties considerably modify that case. Instead of their taking out, on balance, it may turn out to be the question of (their) bringing in, money. Even if we omit these mitigating conditions, they are no more to blame than any other foreigners working in Ceylon.<sup>33</sup> The Commission did not, on the whole, consider the Chettiers' rate of interest high. In its opinion, the Chettiers' rates were usually under the limits sanctioned by legislation. It was only in exceptional cases, where the risk was great, that they tried to evade the law and that, too, was perhaps attempted by the lower class Chettiers. The Chettiar-system of giving loan involved risk, no doubt, the risk arising mainly from the fact that the credit allowed by the Chettiers was too facile. The Chettiar often lent money merely on the strength of the personal knowledge of the borrower, without being very particular about the scrutiny of the borrower's securities. This encouraged reckless borrowing and made the repayment of the loan difficult. The creditors had to appeal to law for the recovery of their loans. This appeal to law entailed upon them legal and extra-legal expenditures which were irrecoverable from the borrowers. The Chettiar money-lenders were, therefore, thrown upon the necessity of making up their loss by increasing the rate of interest. Thus viewed, the Chettiar-rate, as the Commission held, should not be pronounced high. In his evidence before the Commission, P.R.S. Chettiar also sought to justify the Chettiers's rate of interest as not being too high: 'A complaint that is generally made against the Chettiar money-lender is his high rate of interest. Leaving aside the case of petty lenders, it is correct to state that the average rate of interest charged by a Chettiar Firm from his customer is  $13\frac{1}{2}$  per cent per annum. If the Chettiar had to borrow his money from bank, he would have to pay (interest) at an average rate of 9 p.c. per annum plus an average commission of  $1\frac{3}{4}$  p.c. We submit that the difference of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  p.c. is hardly sufficient to cover the extraordinary risk which a Chettiar money-lender takes in his transaction.'<sup>34</sup> Endorsing the above view the Commission observed: '... We do not think that the margin of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  per cent per annum is usurious, because the loss has to be regarded as being recouped from earnings from interest.'<sup>35</sup>

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33 Ibid., Para. 181, p. 46.

34 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXIII, 1934, pp. 66. Evidence of P.R.S. Chettiar, Secretary, the Ceylon Nattukottai Chettiers' Association, Colombo, op. cit.

35 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXII, 1934, Para. 176, p. 45, op. cit.

A usurious transaction or not, money-lending fell into disfavour of the Nattukottai Chettians in the long run. Explaining the reasons why they decided to discontinue their money-lending business in Sri Lanka, P.R.S. Chettiar stated before the Commission that from about 1925 the prices of the commodities grown in Sri Lanka began to show a downward tendency, with the result that the banks, anticipating a depreciation of the securities in their hands, began to call in their outstanding dues from the Chettiar business men and from others. A well-known Chettiar Firm which had been doing extensive business throughout the Island failed to liquidate its dues to the banks. The failure of the Firm infected the Chettiar community in general with nervousness. The banks also became anxious about the recovery of the outstanding debts from the Chettiar community. The money-lenders began to collect as much of their dues as possible from their own clients to meet their obligations to the banks. Meanwhile, in 1929-1930, the world-wide economic crisis set in, the prices of rubber and cocoanut fell to a low level, and the introduction of Income-Tax became imminent. The Chettians remitted back a large amount of their money to India to avoid the payment of double Income-Tax. They now settled down to a more restricted credit-policy and many among them abandoned money-lending altogether.

And yet, who will belittle the significance of the role of the Nattukottai Chettians in the economic life of the British Ceylon or will underestimate the services they rendered to all classes of people from the British planters and British business men at the top right down to the boutique-keepers, kanganies and estate labourers? When Ceylon of the early 19th century could offer no banking facilities to the British planters and British business houses, it was the Nattukottai Chettians who functioned as their bankers by helping them to encash their Sterling bills and by importing silver rupees from India to facilitate their making small payments in Sri Lanka. With the establishment of the British exchange banks the Chettians lost their dominant position among the British planters and business men as their bankers. Nevertheless, they remained a vital part of the country's economic life. After the British exchange banks had come into being, they formed an indispensable link between those banks and the vast body of the Ceylonese borrowers. In other words, they continued to be the main sources of credit to the Ceylonese agriculturists, traders and boutique-keepers. As observed by the Ceylon Banking Commission, 1934, 'among private financiers the place of pride must be given to the class of bankers and money-lenders popularly known as Chetties or Chettians. While walking through the streets of Colombo, Negombo,

Kandy or any other big town in Ceylon one cannot fail to be attracted by the name-board of a Chettiar with various letters of the alphabet preceding his surname. Their business in money is so well-known and vast that their name is synonymous with private banking.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Nattukottai Chettiars contributed, in no small measure, to the economic development of Sri Lanka. British business men had at their disposal British capital to finance their own enterprises but the Ceylonese people could expect no such financial help from the British funds. Neither had they any savings of their own to sustain their economic endeavours. So they turned to the Chettiar money-lenders and got a ready and encouraging response. The Chettiars, who lent money with the unheard-of facility without being very particular about the ability of the borrower to repay the loan or about the securities or about the normally defective title-deeds to the lands mortgaged, were willing to accommodate all—genuine business men, speculators and the spend-thrift alike. 'They lent as readily to the exporter of desiccated cocoanut as to the impecunious land-owner trying to raise a dowry for his unmarried daughter.' P.R.S. Chettiar's memorandum is eloquent on the contribution of the Nattukottai Chettiars to the development of the agriculture, industry and commerce of Sri Lanka: 'A few words may not be out of place in regard to the part that the Nattukottai Chettiar community has played in the development of the agriculture, industries and commerce of Ceylon. With the exception of a few Ceylonese who had facilities for obtaining credit from the local banks, the bulk of the Ceylonese had to resort to the Chettiar money-lender in order to be financed in their various undertakings. The Chettiar went forward boldly to the rescue of the Ceylonese applicants for loans of money. He lent both on mortgages as well as otherwise. In view of the admitted fact that the law of title to land in Ceylon is highly complicated, it is really commendable that the Chettiar invested so freely in the mortgage of Ceylon lands. Large acreage of Ceylon jungles and waste lands have been opened up and cultivated with cocoanut with the aid of money borrowed from the Chettiar community. Several industrial and commercial undertakings have been freely financed by them, and the petty trader and retailer had to depend entirely upon the Chettiar for financial assistance. A noteworthy feature of all these transactions is that money became available to the Ceylonese borrower at a moment's notice in any part of the day or night without his being obliged to go through the formalities which a borrower had to experience elsewhere.'<sup>37</sup> The Nattukottai Chettiars were no less helpful to the

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37 Ceylon Sessional Paper XXIII of 1934, pp. 66, op. cit.



kanganies and the estate labourers. During their periodic or occasional visits to South India, the Tamil estate labourers used to carry a portion of their savings—the major portion being remitted through Post Offices—in the form of Chetty drafts or Chetti demand-drafts, called 'hundis',<sup>38</sup> which the Chetty money-lenders in Sri Lanka issued on the 'hundi' shops in many of the South Indian towns and villages having financial transactions with them. The kanganies also used to carry 'coast advances' to Madras, in connection with the recruitment of labourers for the plantations in Sri Lanka, in the form of 'hundis', without taking the risk of carrying much silver personally. Thus both the labourers and the kanganies avoid the possible risk of theft or loss of silver rupees enroute to the Indian coast, by purchasing 'hundis' from the Chettiar money-lenders. According to Savarinatha Pillai's monograph on the Nattukottai Chettiars' Banking business, 50 per cent of the Nattukottai Chettiars in Sri Lanka had business in 'hundis'.<sup>39</sup>

With all their services as money-lenders the Nattukottai Chettiars were often condemned as 'Shylocks and blood-suckers'. They were accused of borrowing money from banks at an average rate of 8 p.c. and of lending money at rates varying from 13 p.c. to 100 p.c.,<sup>40</sup> although the Chettiars themselves claimed that their average rate of interest was only 13½ per cent. Despite their high rate of interest, the high rate being justified by P.R.S. Chettiar in his evidence before the Ceylon Banking Commission, as stated above, the rural sector of the economy of Sri Lanka, constituting the bulk of the indigenous population who lay outside the pale of the facilities of the banking system, used to resort to the Chettiar money-lenders and to have the satisfaction of getting the much-needed funds from them. What would have been the fate of the economic endeavours of the indigenous population, had there been no Nattukottai Chettiars to render them the monetary aid they required?

In the present economic set-up of Sri Lanka wedded to the post-independence policy of the nationalization of her economy, the Nattu-

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36 Ibid, Para. 159, p. 40.

38 The forms of hundis in use were the following : (a) Darsanai hundi payable at sight or on demand ; (b) the hundi payable after a specified period, e.g. forty days after the date of execution ; (c) the hundi bearing nadappu or current rate of interest till the date of encashment.

39 Vide Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, Vol. III, 1930.

40 Gunasekera—From dependent currency to Central Banking in op. cit., Ceylon, op. cit., p. 205.

kottai Chettiar is no longer a name to conjure with in the banking and money-lending field of the country. Today the Nattukottai Chettiars are almost a forgotten community in Sri Lanka. The economic activities of the few that still remain there are restricted to trade and the ownership of estates.<sup>41</sup>

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41 Weerasooria—op. cit., pp. xxii, 157.

## A FRENCH DOCUMENT ON TEXTILE PRODUCTION AND MARKETS IN BENGAL : 1790\*

ANIRUDDHA RAY

A considerable amount of literature exists on the cultivation and production of cotton textile in Bengal during the pre-capitalist period. Most scholars emphasised the cultivation of fine varieties of cotton and have chosen to ignore the coarse type consumed by the majority of Bengalis; thus they have betrayed an elitist bias. The decline of muslin industry of Dacca, including cultivation and production, had aroused sometimes blissful wonder and some times indignation, even among the officials from the beginning of the 19th century till our days.

The main emphasis was however on the decline of muslin grown around Dacca, thus emphasising the localisation rather than on the product. This was done in a remarkable way by James Taylor,<sup>1</sup> which had remained a classic in cotton literature. Abdul Karim<sup>2</sup> was almost the last one in such a list. In his case, however, we would notice a synthesis of description of the quality of production and its localisation.

That this decline was a serious concern to the British Government and its officials, can be seen from that the fact, that again and again, the official reports emphasised the new experiments in cotton transplantation<sup>3</sup> for the increased production and the "abundant supplies of

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\* Published in the Proceedings of Third Bangladesh History Conference, Dacca, 1973. Courtesy : Bangladesh Itihas Parishad.

1 Taylor, James : *A Sketch of the Topography & Statistics of Dacca*, Calcutta, 1839

2 Karim, Abdul : *Daccal Muslin*, Dacca, 1965 (In Bengali).

3 Most of the 19th century works dwelt at length on these experiments, which however did not include the revival of "Phoottee" cotton, needed to produce muslin. Regarding the experiments made before 1828, see, *Letter from the Secretary to the India Board to the Secretary of the Board of Trade*, September 22, 1828, published in *Reports and Documents connected with the Proceedings of the East India Company in regard to the Culture and Manufacture of Cotton-Wool, Raw Silk & Indigo in India*, London, 1836, pp. 119 onwards. After 1830's see Royale, J. Forbes : *Culture and Commerce of Cotton in India and Elsewhere*, London, 1851.

raw materials" "for the manufacture of Europe"<sup>4</sup> (report of Dunbar—1844)—than the revival of textile manufacture on traditional lines<sup>5</sup> ("nothing can be done for its revival"—Dunbar report). This emphasis of the reports on raw material was meant to feed the constantly increasing capacity of the Manchester machines<sup>6</sup> and concomitantly facing problems of labour.<sup>7</sup> One should mention here that the official reports, such as the one by Dunbar, completely exonerated the British Government for the failure of the Indian muslins to fight with the British muslins in the markets of Europe.

As is well known, that the beginning of 19th century, competition began between the American and the Indian cotton, in which the former pre-dominated<sup>8</sup>. Lancaster and Manchester however were unwilling to depend entirely on the American supply, which was uncertain, and they were eagerly looking for an alternative from India, where experiments began with cultivation of different types of cotton, with disastrous results. The actual cotton crisis from 1840's onwards led to prolific publication in England on Indian cotton<sup>9</sup>, in which an attack on the failure of the Company to develop the raw material in India was involved<sup>10</sup>. Defenders of the Company were not lacking in answering the charges, among whom one should take the examples of Royal and Medlicot<sup>11</sup>. But both these writers

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4 *Letter of Dunbar*, Chief Commissioner of Dacca to The Sudder Board of Revenue, Fort William, 2nd of May, 1844, quoted in full in Karim, Abdul, *op. cit.*, Appendix.

5 *Ibid*, p. 132.

6 For table showing the imports of raw cotton in Great Britain, see Royale, *op. cit.*, pp 80-81. See, Bains, E. : *History of the Cotton Manufacture of Great Britain*, London, 1835, for 320% increase of imports between 1781-1791 (pp. 217-218).

7 Smelser, N. J. : *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1959.

8 Royale, *op. cit.*, table cited for a comparison between American and Indian imports.

9 For this whole question, see Silver, A.W. : *Manchester-Men and India Cotton, 1847-1872*, Manchester University Press, 1966. In 1849, American supply was 40% short (p. 59). For publications, see pp. 58-59.

10 *Ibid*, pp 62-64. This was the content of the attack of John Bright in the Parliament in 1846-47 crisis.

11 Royale, *op. cit.*, Medlicot, J.G. : *Cotton Handbook for Bengal*, Calcutta, 1862, who suggested the causes of the decline of cotton trade as due to anomalous position of the merchants, malpractices of officials and middlemen, neglect and adulteration and bad cultivation (pp. 8-14). For Hobhouse's defence of the Company in the Parliament, see Silver, *op. cit.*

depended to a great extent on the published material of the Company<sup>12</sup>, starting the history generally after 1780's.

While Royale quoted the report of Dunbar to argue that since the cotton manufacture has declined, it would be better to find raw materials for other manufactures<sup>13</sup>, while, at the same time, disbelieving the Company's undated estimate (before 1799) that 7,000,000 lbs of cotton were produced in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa as full requirement of the provinces<sup>14</sup>. Interestingly he came to state that Bengal was not a cotton country, where only 1/8th of total manufacture was cultivated, basing evidently on the report of 1799<sup>15</sup>.

Medlicot, writing in 1862, went a step further and proudly proclaimed that, "It seems, by no means an improbable conjecture, that the influence of the manufacturing trade was but local even in its best days, and that the effect which its withdrawal had on the aggregate cotton crop of Bengal has often been greatly exaggerated"<sup>16</sup>. He reiterated it, while reviewing the experiment of Mr. Price in 1843-44, and twisted the comment of Dunbar by stating<sup>17</sup> that "...the

12 *Reports and Documents*, op. cit.

13 Royale, *op. cit.*, p. 251. Dunbar stated, regarding cotton manufacture at Dacca, "it seems certain that any attempt to restore it would be vain, which may doubtless be done, for the district by providing for the manufactures of Europe abundant supplies of raw material. This is a field which affords scope for the most extended philanthropy . . . . Products of various kinds might be raised which find a ready market in Europe" (pp. 132-133).

14 Royale, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

15 *Extract Report of the Import and Export Trade of Calcutta by sea, from 1st June 1799 to 31st May 1800*, N° 9 of *Reports and Documents*, p. 17. Full text is cited in this article.

16 Medlicot, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

17 *Ibid*, p. 107. Dunbar's statement is given here in full : "Should the soil (i.e. of Dacca) be found as favourable to the growth of the exotic, as it is to that of indigenous cotton, there are extensive tracts of land either overrun with jungle, or occupied by crops of far less value and importance which might be advantageously turned to account in supplying this article for exportation to England" (p. 133). Here is the comment of Medlicot, given in full : "At the close of the experiment, Mr. Commissioner Dunbar, who was throughout its career, greatly interested in its success, informs Government that its history does not establish any one fact of general interest, certainly not that the Dacca district is incapable of growing exotic cotton" (p. 107). Please note that there is no mention of the "indigenous cotton". Could this be based on a later report of Dunbar, as the experiments of Mr. Price were not over by 1844 when Dunbar wrote this report (p. 133) ?

Dacca district is incapable of growing exotic cotton"—a statement which was not supported by Mr. Price himself.<sup>18</sup>

Thus while early official reports, like that of 1790, continually spoke of the decrease of fine cotton since the late Mughal days, Medlicot blandly asserted that there was no diminution of cotton crop since 1790<sup>19</sup>—a line that was taken to exonerate perhaps the friends in East India Company in direct contrast to the statements of Taylor or the official report that there were large number unemployed weavers<sup>20</sup>. These apparently conflicting reports led John Bright of Manchester to demand a Royal Commission to go to India to find out facts, which was turned down by the Parliament in 1850<sup>21</sup>. If the information coming to London before 1850 was conflicting or negligible<sup>22</sup>, then it would be difficult to understand how Medlicot found out that cotton "seldom appeared in the village Bazaar, but was spun by its actual growers, and served to clothe them and their families, after being worked up by the nearest weaver. Precisely the same state of things now obtains."<sup>23</sup>

While Medlicot was so certain in hazarding opinions, the earlier official reports were not so certain. The report to the Board of Trade, 1789-1790 on the cultivation and Trade of Cotton, mentioned that Surat cotton was formerly brought to this port but "it is not be considered, as consumption of the province"<sup>24</sup>. Again, regarding the famous phootee cotton, the report stated clearly that "...the quantity produced cannot be ascertained.....Any estimate must be vague and

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18 See, Medlicot, *op. cit.*, pp 107 onwards. Mr. Wise disagrees with Dunbar.

19 At first he stated that the proportion of cultivated land "has not materially altered in the agregate" since 1790, although one "can not now discover what proportion of the ground under cultivation in Bengal grew cotton in 1790" (p. 45).

20 In 1800, Taylor found only 3 excellent spinners at Dacca and 6 to 7 persons at Sonargao, quoted in Karim, *op. cit.*, p 25. See also, *Reports and Documents*, pp. XXX.

21 Silver, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

22 *Ibid*, p. 59.

23 Medlicot, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

24 *Reports and Documents*, p 352. Incidentally, Taylor reported that Mirzapur cotton was first imported in 1783 and in 1782-83, "the whole provision of the Company's investment was made from Desy and Byratty cotton" (p. 338). Abdul Karim has figured out that in 1747, out of total muslin export from Bengal, amounting to Rs. 28½ lakhs, only about 3/4 lakhs of cotton were imported to Bengal from outside (*op. cit.*, p. 86).

uncertain"<sup>25</sup> We should also remember that the Hindustan cotton, imported into Bengal from 1783 onwards, was bought by Bengal traders "for exportation to China."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, suppressing the essentials of the earlier reports, by the mid-nineteenth century it was pointed out to the world that there was a justification in not taking up a programme for revival of manufacture, while giving increasing importance to the production of raw materials, as the technical skill had vanished. The semblance of statistics that "the weavers at present depend upon the upcountry cotton imported in Bengal for seven-eighths of the quantity used in their various manufactures" written incidentally for the first time in an official report of 1799<sup>27</sup> was given good publicity and quoted again and again, without taking into consideration the perspectives of the times, when cotton production was at its lowest ebb, due to various factors, including the famous famines of 1770 and 1788. Thus, by the middle of the 19th century, the decline of cotton production was made ideologically justifiable

That the decline of manufacture might be due to the economic motivation was hinted by Silver in a study of 1966 that "If these spinners and weavers were driven out of business, it would dry up the local demand for raw Indian cotton in the East itself and lead to the dropping of cotton from its place in the rotation of crops in western India. Without that source of supply there would be no possibility of a shift of Indian cotton to Liverpool to make up for any deficiency in the American cotton"<sup>28</sup>. This would confirm M. Desai and Bipan Chandra's refutation of the arguments of Morris D. Morris, in showing that no statistical formulation can be made regarding the demand and that we should have more facts.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Reports and Documents*, p. 352.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>27</sup> See, *supra* note n° 15 of this article.

<sup>28</sup> Silver, *op cit*, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Desai, M., article entitled "Demand for cotton Textiles in Nineteenth century India", published in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. VIII, N° 4, December 1971, pp. 337-361, particularly p. 359. For a study of 19th century supply of cotton, see the unpublished paper of Guha, Amalendu entitled "Output and Availability of Raw Cotton in India, 1851-1901", presented to the Seminar of *Transformation of the Medieval Indian Economy into Colonial Economy*, held at Aligarh in 1972.

The ideological explanation was not accepted by the Indian scholars also, who raised unpleasant questions. Reviewing the crucial period from 1757 to 1772, when the English East India Co.'s trade increased at the expense of Dutch and French Companies, J. C. Sinha, writing as early as 1927, postulated that this increase "was therefore in great measure the result of its increased political influence and power. It was also partly due to the practice of providing investment out of the surplus of territorial revenues and partly from the monopolistic control over the important staple of exports"<sup>30</sup>. This aspect was brought out very ably by N. K. Sinha<sup>31</sup> in his well-documented work, which gave a new direction towards the re-interpretation and confirmation of the fact that the decline was the handiwork of the British Raj for their greater glories of Imperialism. In a work, mainly based on British evidence, Dr. Sinha made a wide sweep covering broad canvas of the inland markets, types of manufacture and sale, stopping short however before 1790, no doubt constrained by the nature of evidence available to him.

The renewed attempt to understand the system prevailing in the pre-capitalist period was made by Barun De in a paper to the Indian Historical Records Commission of 1958, who took up a report of 1791 on cotton in Jungalbari area in Midnapore<sup>32</sup>. While Abdul Karim gave a broader account of a fine variety in the Dacca area, De tried to make depth study of the entire process from cultivation to handloom manufacture and sale. But all these were based on the British evidences in which the British penetration was faintly discernible, thanks to the quarrel between British private merchants and British officials. Even in these attempts of study no thorough work was done on the British influence over the method of purchase.

That the British influence negated their own idea of "free trade" as early as 1790, in the control of the inland markets, could be seen from a Danish report of 1789, presented by Feldback in the *Bengal*

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30 Sinha, J. C. : *Economic Annals of Bengal*, London, 1972, p. 78.

31 Sinha, N. K. : *The Economic History of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1965, 3rd ed., vol I. (1st ed 1956), particularly pp. 28-31.

32 De, Barun, article entitled "An Account of Cultivation of Cotton in Bengal", published in *Indian Historical Records Commission, Trivandrum*, 1958, Vol. 34, pp. 197-207, Account of Browne to Dundas, dated August 19, 1791 (Melville papers), who pointed out that the decay of the coarser types of cotton textiles had a disastrous effect, which had been neglected by the historians of 20th centuries compared to their well documented works on fine variety.



*Past & Present* in 1967<sup>33</sup>. Taking the area of Birbhum, once again making an example of the localisation of production and trade, this was a non-English report, where the hint of British penetration was given, leaving the other markets out of purview.

The totality of British penetration and control over the Indian markets could be seen, perhaps for the first time in the geographical span of Bengal in 1790, by the French report presented here, written by M. Deona, an agent of the French Company in 1790<sup>34</sup>. The report made a review of cloth-producing centres and the Indian markets, the type of production and method of purchase, as well as its constraints. For the first time also, the report brought clarity about the British mastery over the markets, which could be seen from a sarcastic comment that unless political power is gained, there could be no profit from the trade. This being the rationale for taking up this document, we shall now present a brief summary of the report.

The document stated that there were four different methods of purchase of cotton goods in Bengal. The first was to contact directly the Aurang by the Gomostha or Dalal, in which case one must advance the necessary fund. The second method was to buy from the English at a commission of 8 to 10%, where one should also advance the necessary fund. The third method was to buy from the English after agreeing on the samples. Here, one-fourth of the total fund was to be advanced at first. The fourth was to purchase directly by cash.

After discussing various advantages and disadvantages, the third method was advised, mainly because here, the total fund was not committed, since the Gomosthas, working at a salary of Rs. 30 to 50

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33 Feldback, Ole, article entitled "Cloth Production and Trade in late Eighteenth Century Bengal : A Report from the Danish Factory in Serampore", published in *Bengal Past & Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number July-December, 1967, Vol. LXXXVI. Part II. Serial N° 162, pp. 124-141. Regarding the report (to be referred as *Danish Report* here), written by J. B. Scavenius, Feldback commented "Because trade was the sole reason for Danish settlements in India, he viewed with concern the increasing British dominance" (p. 124).

34 "Mémoire sur le Commerce du Bengale par M. Deonna, agent de la Cie. des Indes de France à Chandernagore—1790" published in *Cargaisons Indiennes*, by Louis Dermigny, Paris, 1959, Vol. II, Appendix VII, pp. 417-424, with notes (The MSS is kept in Geneva Library).

per month<sup>35</sup>, were in the habit of mismanaging the fund. Although in the second method, a profit of 18 to 20% on the Aurang price could be made, yet in the third method, in case of failure to supply the right quality material, either an indemnity of 20% could be demanded or an assortment could be made, with new price fixation. Here the profits would be 3 to 5%. The fourth method would increase the price at least by 10%.

The report then described each Aurang with its dependant areas. In Dacca area, an assortment was required as only fine and superfine cotton goods would be available. Here sicca rupees would cost 8%, more and batta would be from 2 to 6%. Brokerage would be one anna per rupee and other expenses would come to 2 to 6%. Advances should be made in Arcot rupees.

In Lakhimpore, Jougdia and Chittagong area, advances should be made in Arcot rupees. "A big quality of cotton goods is made here of which the major part is sold on the market by the weavers themselves or the Dalals." For large quantities, one should make contracts, even with weavers directly, who would take a discount of one anna per rupee. Other expenses would come to around 6%. "Clothes are made here and bought in bales from the Bazars."

In Malda and other towns of the district, contract should be made for each hundred of threads in the cloth, for which Dalals would be required. "The English are very jealous and it is very difficult to make contracts." Sicca rupee is current and batta from 1 to 2% depends on the supply of money. Other charges are 5 to 6%.

In Santipore, Nadia areas contract would be necessary to get large quantity of clear cloths. The private Bengalis and English would not want to do business here as the chances of success were limited. This was due to uncertain quality supplied as well as hiking up prices by the Gomosthas at the last moment. This was really the sellers market, as even after refusal, the Gomosthas could return the goods to the weavers to sell these off with 10% indemnity. The weaver would dictate the price according to the number of buyers, i.e. on the incidence

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35 It seems that the salary of the Gomostha varies not only from area to area but from employer to employer. For example, in Birbhum, if he is employed by a Bengali, Moorish or Armenian merchant, his salary would be from 15 to 20 rupees per month (*Danish Report*, p. 131).

of demand. "Therefore, one should not visit this Aurang often." There is no batta on the sicca rupee. Other charges vary from 6 to 10%.

In Birbhum area, the demand on 'gara' was heavy<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, contract should be made on 'passable' cloth. Generally, all sorts of coins were current, though 11 to 12 sun would give a batta of 2%. Other changes would come to Rs. 7 per corgé (20 pieces)<sup>37</sup>.

In Bhusna, Haripal, Dhaniakhaly etc. contract would be a necessity. The Dalals were knaves and it would be dangerous to confide large sums to them. Other charges would come to 7 to 8%.

In Chandrokona area, cash purchase could be made. But, due to large concentration of weavers here, the English allowed them to work freely here to produce a good quantity of cloth<sup>38</sup>. The Dalals were rich here and it would be safe therefore to advance fund. For this reasons, contract would be preferred. One anna per silver sicca rupee would be given as Batta. Other charges would come to 10%.

In Chandernagor and surrounding areas, handkerchiefs, phoottees, Doreas, 'prohibitive' sirsicca and Calladonies were made here in good quantities. Contract should be made in gold and silver sicca rupee, the latter giving a batta of 3%. One should have large fund because

36 "It is estimated that 160,000 pieces, or rather more, of Birbhum garrahs are sent to Europe annually; the English investment in this category is never less than 80,000 pieces . . . A very considerable quantity of gurrahs is sent to Batavia and East coast . . . so that probably more than 400,000 pieces are manufactured in the district of Birbhum in normal year: but even in December, nevertheless, such a scarcity of good middling gurrahs might frequently occur, that no quantity can be acquired except for ready money" (*Danish Report*, pp. 128-129).

37 This seems to be heavy in view of Rs. 2 for washing charge per corgé stated by the *Danish Report*, p. 132. One should include transportation charges of 2½ to 5% on the Aurang price.

38 Compare for instance, the *Danish Report* regarding Birbhum: "For several years the English Government has tried many ways to procure good cloth at advantageous prices for the Company, but in doing so it has always spoiled the trade of the other nations and the natives rather than gained any advantage for the Company" (p. 131). We should note that the French report says nothing of this kind regarding Birbhum. Could we then accept Feldback's comment that "some of the contemporary French reports" are biased with "strong political engagement", which "somewhat tends to diminish the historical value" (p. 124) ?

the weavers were poor and "pass from colony to another with the funds because they are assured of finding protection"<sup>39</sup>. Dalals would take two annas as little expenses. Other charges would be 2 annas per piece of handkerchief.

Regarding Balasore area, clothes made here were not taken in Europe for fear of loss. As regards Patna and North India, the English would not allow the French to go there. Only the English and some Bengalis established there would dare to make the advances. Contract should be made with the weavers, although cash purchase from the Bazar could be made.

The report had made certain general observations. The first was scarcity of rice and sometime the absence of cotton in the harvest, though the latter is rare. The price of a certain quality would depend on its supply and therefore would vary. For example, type B would become type A if the latter would be in short supply. Cash purchase therefore must be made at an appropriate time.

Secondly, clothes made from August to October were not so good. Clothes made by the weavers from January to February were of very fine thread. These were made in the preceeding year. It would not swell much in washing. The tailors would be free then and could give more attention to the cloth. Also these clothes were washed in the rainy season, making it good white due to abundant clear water and the heat of the sun<sup>40</sup>. From July to September, the weavers would be busy in the harvest while the tailors remained busy from July to October. Also, the rice cooked with cotton would swell the thread. One would be obliged to take these from the Gomosthas since the time would be pressing.

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39 Compare, for instance, the *Danish Report* : "All over Bengal these miserable times, when 2½ to 3 rupees and more are to be paid for the quantity of rice which formerly cost one rupee at most, have so oppressed the poor working people, that the weavers in Birbhum and other districts have to unite . . . Advances are paid, but only in small sums, for fear that they shall spend the money on food and deliver no clothes or run away to some other places. A peon is, therefore, often sent who stands over the poor creature and supervises the work", (p. 137). Also, see p. 130, for weavers' earning and his condition Dutt, K. K. in the Introduction of *Fort-William India House Correspondence*, Vol I, 1748-1756, has pointed out price of rice increased by nearly 30% from 1738 to 1751 (p. LXVI).

His third observation was regarding the timing of sale. In August and September, private ships would not either touch India or would not collect cargo. Therefore, the demand would not be high then. The weavers, needing money immediately for the second cloth, would sell these at an honest profit. Generally, the ships would leave India for Europe by 25th of January<sup>41</sup>. After this, there would be a sharp fall in the demand making it a buyer's market. The weavers would then sell with a profit varying from 5 to 10%. The clothes would not be so beautiful or white but one would be able to buy almost at the price of the Aurang.

He ended with a suggestion and a warning. "Those who have funds should conclude their contracts at the latest in January." The clothes coming out upto June would be of superior quality to those that would come after. "Finally, ...one should not make many contracts or divide the fund among many hands in the same Aurang, because the competition thus established among its proper Gomosthas or contractors would increase the price of the cloth and drown the interests of the investors, since the weavers and the Dalals do not consider the quantity of funds distributed in the Aurang but only the number of persons who want the clothes and they can not take advantage excepting competition".

The report therefore pointed to the marketing system of the pre-capitalist period throughout Bengal, the system still dominated by the sellers mostly, showing at the same time traditional manufacturing areas. Significantly, there was no hint of quantification and it would therefore be an absolute necessity to find out more about this transitional period to pass judgements with statistical tools and methodology. The report also, stressed the importance of non-British source as primary material in understanding the transformation of the traditional economy of Bengal in a colonial one.

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40 For a similar statement in the *Danish Report*, pp. 139-140, although not so detailed.

41 The *Danish Report* puts the departure of the ships till March 10, while the selling season starts from November 10 (p. 134).

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE ON THE UNUSED BENGALI  
DOCUMENTS PRESERVED AT THE STATE ARCHIVES,  
WEST BENGAL, AS A SOURCE FOR THE ECONOMIC  
HISTORY OF 18th CENTURY BENGAL\*

GAUTAM BHADRA

The paper is merely exploratory in character in so far it points out the importance of various records written in Bengali for reconstructing the economic history of 18th century Bengal. A number of records, varied in character, has been kept at the state archives, West Bengal and not been used by any scholar exhaustively.<sup>1</sup> In the typed catalogue preserved at the archives all these records happen to be divided according to Persian, Bengali and mixed Persian and Bengali records with this admission "The records in Persian and Bengali in the

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\* An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 35th Session of Indian History Congress, 1974.

I owe to Professor Barun De who has encouraged me to explore these materials. Professor Asoke Sen, Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and my friends Subhendu Dasgupta and Keya Deb have made valuable comments. Srimati Rita Bandyopadhyay and Enakshi Mukhopadhyay have provided technical assistance. I thank them all

1 Professor N. K. Sinha, in his book, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. II Calcutta, 1962, has mentioned the vernacular papers of a few zamindari houses; but it seems, however, that the papers preserved at the state archive fail to draw his attention as a source for his subject. He is quite aware of their existence because he has written in his illuminating essay "Indian Historical Records" *Bengal Past and Present*, January 1973, in this language "In the West Bengal records office we find records in English, Persian and Bengali" (p 9). Despite this statement, his primary concern was with the English records, as it appears from an earlier sentence "The West Bengal records office does not contain records before 1756, Sirajuddaulah's capture of Calcutta having destroyed records before that date." *loc. cit.* It is true only in the case of English records whereas the Persian records go back to the middle of 17th century and the Bengali records to the days of Murshid Quli Khan. Mrs. Ratnalekha Ray, in her unpublished doctoral thesis, "Change in Bengal Agrarian Society 1760-1850", Cambridge, 1973, however, has used, a fragment of Mahishadal papers preserved at the archives and has reported about all other papers as missing. See her bibliography.

possession of the Govt. of Bengal have not been properly examined".<sup>2</sup> Subject-wise, it has been categorised into—(a) historical records and (b) revenue records—as if revenue records cannot be considered as historical. The purpose of this present article is to concentrate on the Bengali records only, though these are less voluminous than the Persian records.

Most of these records happens to be kept in various bundles haphazardly and often it is impossible to get those records even after giving requisition slips due to the lack of arrangement. All these records, transferred to the archives from various district collectorate offices, form merely a fragment of the records of the collectorates and indicate a vast treasure lying there, if at all, untapped.

Broadly speaking, the records written in Bengali language, examined so far, may be divided subject-wise into four major categories—(a) various types of zamindari accounts, (b) records on sale and purchases of lands, (c) records on land grants and (d) miscellaneous records referring to trade, merchants and mahajans. These zamindari records are primarily concerned with the position of the peasants, the amount of land cultivated and use of lands for various other purposes and the revenue demand on them. Most of them is statistical in nature and gives data at the '*mauja*' level.

The second type of records is declaratory in nature. These are written in the form of statements by the sellers to the purchasers giving necessary details of rights transferred.

The third type of records is kept in the form of statement and of register. The statement is written language of well-known *Madad-i-Ma'ash* land grants. The register, however, also gives the statistical information on these grants in a tabular form and constitute a part of the '*Baze Zamin Daftar*'.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth type of records is intermingled with other types. It consists of the account books of various Merchants and records on items of trade.

The earliest extant record in the Bengali language refers to the rule of Murshid Quli Khan. From that time onwards, the records

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2 Catalogue, p. 119

3 For details of this institution, Sinha, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-275.

cover the period up to 1850s.<sup>4</sup> However, the present article is restricted to the analysis of the records only upto the pre-permanent settlement days.

The difficulties inherent in the use of such types of sources are obvious. First, the records are fragmentary. It is not possible to get the particular series of records uniform either in space or in time. The gaps are many. Secondly, being the records on the lower level, all kinds of customary usages peculiar to that particular area modify the information of the records to a certain extent. The meaning of the terms used and the units of measurement vary from area to area.<sup>5</sup>

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4 A few instances may be offered. The papers of a salt merchant Gadhadhar Kundu are available. The year is 1842 (Original Consultation (hereafter cited as O.C.) Nos. 41-45. The bundle has been called as papers of 24 Pargnas, Home Dept.—Revenue. Again it is possible to trace the rise of a zamindar's official, Kali Krishna Roy, to the position of a zamindar in Tiperrah from 1833 to 1840. He purchased the zamindari of toppa Durgapore at Sicca 900 Rs from the original owner Kewal Krishna Roy. From thence his rise was sharp, *ibid*, Nos. 155-156. Some of his records are also kept in the papers called "big bundle" consisting of Persian petitions, bondbust and other misc. documents, Governor of Bengal, Fort William Nos., 159-162. Kiste, Daul "Big Bundle" Nos. 1-132. There are also various kinds of appeals. For example, in the year 1854, appeal by Rakhal Das Mukhopadhyay of Damodarpur, at Midnapore for remission of revenue on account of loss of crops due to flood. No. 167, *ibid*. There are also records concerned with the history of Assam. The names of different *izaradars* of the Ghats, mails, *Tangkunis* (circle) and the *jama* payable by them and their assessed income in these *mahals* is given in a tabular form. The date of one file is 1830-31. The other file is without date. The undated file Nos. 90-91 is in the Big bundle, Nos. 133-284, 285-308, Board of Revenue, Revenue Dept.

5 For example, in Chittagong the land was used to be measured in a unit called 'Drone—Kali' which is different from ordinary measurement prevalent in other parts of Bengal. A drone contains about 19½ bighas. The chittas of certain taluks of Islamabad dated 1126-27 B.S./1720-21 A.D. would prove the use of this measurement. OC Nos. 86-88, 114. Records Transferred from Chittagong collectorate, Home Department. Also see A. Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His times*, Dacca, 1963, p. 87. A. M. Serajuddin—*The Revenue Administration of the East India Company in Chittagong*, 1761-1785, Chittagong, 1971, p. 225. The term 'chakla' generally denotes a large division of a country comprising a number of Parganas, whereas in Chittagong it generally has the connotation of small revenue subdivisions. Serajuddin, *ibid*, p. 59, fn. 5. I have consulted the following books for the meaning of terms used in these records: D. C. Smyth, *Original Bengalese Zamindari accounts*, Calcutta, 1823. *Guide and Glossary to Survey and Settlement Records in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1917. Sashisekhar Ghosh—*Zamindari Darpan*,



Thirdly, there is every possibility that in order to defraud the higher authorities, the intermediaries sometimes put forward wrong statistical informations.<sup>6</sup> Despite these defects, these records give a few bits of information immediately related to various microscopic units of the region and point out many interesting details and deviations which the official records of the higher level, in search for a more generalised picture, possibly ignore. The full purport of these records can be realised if these are used only in combination with the records written in the European languages and Persian language. This paper's aim is, however, modest; it merely makes a rough selection of the records pointing the possible information that can be gleaned from these records in a scattered way. To that extent, the treatment of these materials is to be considered extremely tentative.

The paper is divided into four broad sections devoted to the analysis of four categories of records. The first section mainly concerned with the area statistics of Chittogong whereas the second gives a picture of sale and purchase of lands in Hooghly and functions of *mahajans*. The third is devoted to an analysis of revenue free lands and its sale whereas the fourth, by using miscellaneous records, points out different kinds of *abwabs*. (*cesses*).

## II

The zamindari records are various in nature. The important among these are, however, *chittas* and *khatians*. The *chitta* is the most basic document and 'an account of all the lands of the villages, divided into dags or portions, according to the order of time in which they are measured. It contains the quantity of land in each dag, a description of its boundaries, the different articles with which it is cultivated

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Calcutta, 1303 B.S. Nrisingha Chandra Mukherjee—*Zamindari Mahajani and bazar Accounts*. Calcutta, 1887. Wilson—*Glossary of Judicial and revenue terms*, (Reprint) Delhi, 1972. The Amini Report, Governor General in Council proceeding, 3rd April, 1778, embodied in R. B. Ramsbotham's book *Land Revenue History of Bengal*, London, 1926 has also contained the explanation of various terms. In this respect I have also taken help of Sri Tarapada Santra and Arabindo Biswas.

6 Philip B. Calkins—"Collecting the Revenue in Early, Eighteenth Century Bengal: From the cultivator to the zamindar", *Bengal: change and continuity*, (ed. by Robert Beech and Mary Jane), Michigan, 1969. He has argued that the control of the Qanungo over the information about land and his manipulation of statistical figures often pressurised the higher authorities to give concessions or to submit to his dictates.

and the names of the ryots who occupy it".<sup>7</sup> *Khatian* is the summation of these information for each *Mauja*. Many *chittas* and *khatians* date back to the years 1720-1722<sup>8</sup> because that was the time when Murshid Kuli Khan completed his plot by plot survey.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of these papers, it is possible to estimate the amount of cultivated lands held by the peasants because these records give the statistical information *chakla* wise on the amount of total land (*jamin*), land brought under cultivation (*Hasil*), land actually cropped that year (*Nal*), baki land, i.e. difference between *hasil* and *nal*, *khil* (waste land), low land (*khandas*), grazing land (*Gopar*) and pond (*Puni*). We have secured a detailed *Khatian* of the *chakla* Uttorkol in the area of Islamabad (Chittagong) during the time of Murshid Quli Khan.<sup>10</sup> The measurement is given in *Drones*. It appears that out of 329 persons only a single person held land above 22 *drones*.<sup>11</sup> The majority appears to be below one drone. The total area covered by these particulars roughly corresponds to 6298 bighas.

In many records, if any portion of land happened to be twice cropped and if any portion produced such crops as sugarcane and cotton, that portion was specifically mentioned. In the papers on the *maujas* of taraf *Chowdhuriyan*, *Chakla-Aurangabad*, out of 104 *drones* only one drone appears to be twice cropped and the land which produced sugarcane also was similar in amount.<sup>12</sup>

There are also records under the title of *Jama Wasil baqi*, *Daul-o-Bondbust*, *Hakikat Jaidad Jamin Siqqa Rupaya* etc. These kinds of

7 Ramsbotham, *op. cit.* pp. 111-12

8 Numerous examples can be cited from the bundle transferred from the Chittagong Collectorate

9 Jadunath Sarkar—*History of Bengal*, Vol. II, (Reprint) Patna, 1972, p. 412. Abdul Karim, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

10 O. C. Khatiyans of *chakla* Uttarkol, Islamabad, Govt. of Bengal, Home Dept., records Branch, 1127 B.S. O.C. No. 44-41, 52-59, 60-67, 68-75. Bundle Transferred from Chittagong Collectorate. Due to certain conversion problems from *Drone* to *Bigha*, the detailed statistical table has not been worked out yet.

11 Another difficulty is that in these records it is not clear what is the exact legal position of the persons mentioned. The meaning of two terms, *Bat* and *Khul*, mentioned in these documents, is not clear. O.C. No. 68175. f. 29 b.

12 *Khatiyans*, 1126 B.S. O.C. No. 17-24, *ibid.* The actual amount is 104 *drones*—4 *cani*—1 *pan* whereas the amount of *do fasala* is 1 *drone*—3 *Kani*.

records contained various statistical items on the annual revenue payable by the zamindar to the government such as its rate, the amount of assessed land etc. A few instances may be given. A record belonging to category of *Hakikat Jaidad Sikka Rupayya* 1159/1752 A.D. about certain Maujas of Sarkar Islamabad has survived.<sup>13</sup> This appears to be a survey done by the amin on behalf of the government. It gives the statistics of all the 62 Maujas on the following heads : total land, various categories of the revenue free land, total collection, share payable to the government and share retained by the Zamindar. The tables cited in the page 215 and 216 can be formed on the basis of these statistics.

From the first table, it appears that during the middle of 18th century the bulk of the revenue free land grant for the religious endowments was concentrated only in one cluster of Mauja (in the first *farda* or Section). It was a rule formulated by Akbar to concentrate these grants in certain villages. This practice which became established norm in the next century in Gujrat and other areas seemed to be accepted in this distant area of Bengal also.<sup>14</sup> Among the revenue free-land holdings the share of the *talukdars* was highest and it shows their position in the rural society. Geographical and demographic reasons may partly account for a considerable area left under waste. However, it shows that the extent of land use varies greatly in the different clusters of the Maujas ; in the third group the proportion of the waste land was 88% whereas in other groups it roughly amounted to 20%.

From the second table, it seems that in these areas the average revenue rate was Rs. 1 per bigha ; the average rate was slightly lower in the third group because there the proportion of the waste land was much higher. Abdul Karim, on the basis of the revenue figures of Chittagong, has suggested that the revenue per bigha was 10 annas.<sup>15</sup> Here is a sharp increase in average revenue rate. The authorities have said that, due to the Maratha pressure, Alivardi had to exact from the

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13 O.C. 187-92. Bundle Transferred from the Chittagong Collectorate. The original figures were in drones. Those have been converted into the bighas. The file has been divided into four parts or '*Fardas*'. Each *farda* constituted a member of *Maujas* and seemed to be selected from four parts of Chittagong.

14 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 1963, p 302.

15 A. Karim, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

TABLE 1

*Different type of revenue free land (in bighas) in Sarkar Islamabad, 1752-53 A.D.*

| Farda No. | Number of Maujas | Zamin   | Bad khil waste land | Madad-i-Māsh religious Endowments | Nijot revenue free land for the subsistence of zamindars | Khanabari revenue free land for homestead of ryots | Pattadari revenue free land for maintenance of Taluqdars | Total revenue free land (Sum of column 4 to 8) | Total revenue free land as % of total Zamin |
|-----------|------------------|---------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
|           | (1)              | (2)     | (3)                 | (4)                               | (5)  | (6)  | (7)  | (8)  | (9)   |
| 1st       | 15               | 594.75  | 53.62<br>(22.50)    | 87.75<br>(36.82)                  | 27.49<br>(11.53)   | 30.42<br>(12.76)                                   | 39.00<br>(16.36)   | 238.29   | 40.06                                       |
| 2nd       | 13               | 231.46  | 19.50<br>(20.83)    | 0                                 | 32.76<br>(35.00)   | 10.92<br>(11.66)                                   | 30.42<br>(32.50)   | 93.60  | 40.44                                       |
| 3rd       | 16               | 258.37  | 163.21<br>(88.75)   | 0                                 | 0  | 8.58<br>(4.66)                                     | 12.09<br>(6.57)  | 183.89   | 71.17                                       |
| 4th       | 18               | 285.09  | 13.26<br>(17.34)    | 0                                 | 2.34<br>(3.06)   | 24.37<br>(31.88)                                   | 36.46<br>(47.69)   | 76.44  | 26.81                                       |
| Total     | 62               | 1369.67 | 249.59<br>(42.14)   | 87.75<br>(14.81)                  | 62.59<br>(10.56)   | 74.29<br>(12.54)                                   | 117.97<br>(19.91)  | 592.22   | 43.24                                       |

Note—The figures in parenthesis represent the percentage of different revenue-free land to the total revenue free land.

people in the forms of casses on the zamindars.<sup>16</sup> However, the question should be probed in further details before any kind of conclusions can be drawn.

TABLE 2

*Revenue statistics of some maujas, Sarkar Islamabad, 1752-53*

| Farda No. | Number of Mauzas | Zamin in bighas | Total revenue-free land in bighas | Zamin-total revenue-free land in bighas | Total collected revenue in Rs. | Per bigha revenue in Rs. |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
|           | (1)              | (2)             | (3)                               | (4)                                     | (5)                            | (6)                      |
| 1st       | 15               | 594.75          | 238.29                            | 356.46                                  | 453.3                          | 1.27                     |
| 2nd       | 13               | 231.46          | 93.60                             | 137.86                                  | 157.8                          | 1.14                     |
| 3rd       | 16               | 258.37          | 183.89                            | 74.48                                   | 57.8                           | 0.77                     |
| 4th       | 18               | 285.09          | 76.44                             | 208.65                                  | 265.6                          | 1.27                     |

TABLE 3

| Farda No. | Number of Mauzas | Mot jama sicca Total collected revenue | Sadar Mal Gujar (Govt. revenue) | % of Col. (3) to Col. (2) | Baki zamindari kharcha-o-raha (Zamindari account) Rs | % of Col. (5) to Col. (2) |
|-----------|------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|
|           | (1)              | (2)                                    | (3)                             | (4)                       | (5)  | (6)                       |
| 1st       | 15               | 435.25                                 | 399.68                          | 88.18                     | 53.50  | 11.80                     |
| 2nd       | 13               | 157.84                                 | 134.00                          | 84.89                     | 23.81  | 15.08                     |
| 3rd       | 16               | 57.84                                  | 49.25                           | 85.14                     | 8.62   | 14.90                     |
| 4th       | 18               | 265.62                                 | 229.94                          | 86.56                     | 35.62  | 13.41                     |
| Total     | 62               | 934.55                                 | 812.87                          | 86.97                     | 121.55   | 13.00                     |

16 K. K. Dutta—*Alivardi and his times, Calcutta*, 1963 p. 141. However, he has argued that the nawab had settled the malguzari on moderate terms. Alivardi exploiting the situation of a family dispute also, increased the 'jama' of Natore zamindar. S. Nandi—"Rani Bhawani of Natore", *Bengal Past & Present*, January to June 1974, p. 87. However, Chittagong seemed to be subject to continuous increase in jamadami from the 1730s to 1760s. Every rupee of the asal jama was increased by 1759, to Rs. 4/13/10½ and the ancient rental of Rs. 68,422 was multiplied into Rs. 331,529. Serajaudinn, *op cit*, p. 16. Also see p. 19.

The third table points out, whatever may be the productivity of the area, the government took the largest share of the revenue collection, the Zamindar was left only with a minor share. The usual practice in the 18th Century seems to be that the zamindars generally claimed 10% of the revenue collection as *malikana*.<sup>17</sup>

There are quite a number of *Qistibandi* papers which show the name of various Zamindars with their names, total revenue payable and monthly instalments at which that amount should be given. An example may be cited,<sup>18</sup> in the form of table no. 4.

Any social historian for Calcutta can find names of the zamindars in Pargana Calcutta and measure their respective position in connection with land in this particular document by the assessment fixed over them and with the help of other kind of sources may reach at certain meaningful conclusions.

### III

The sale and purchase documents are also interesting. Its form is like this—"This memorandum is written to blessed Ramtaru Mitra, Durgacharan Mitra, son of Kalikinkar Mitra. The wife of Ramdeb Mitra, Ishwari Dasi is selling her estate in Kismat Mirzapur and Kismat Nawar, Pargana Balia, Chakla Hugli, Sarkar Satgon, with Sadar Tumar Jama of 25 Rs. I at my free will sold to you Devottar, Brohmattar, and rent free land for my homestead (*Khanabari*) with *Rayati* (land cultivated by the peasants), *Khamar* (land cultivated by himself) *Chakran* (Service lands), waste, jungle and taxes over forest, water and ponds, the new land created by the river and others, my everything in lieu of Siqu 301 Rs. and received the rupees from the *Dokan* of Dulal Nandi Potdar. You, after writing the estate at your name and paying revenue occupying it and enjoy it hereditarily. The right to donate or to sale has been invested in you. I and my

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17 B. R. Grover—"the nature of the Zamindari villages during the Mughal age." *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, July, 1965, p. 260. Cf. Habib *op. cit.* pp. 150-151. Again, in Bengali 'Kharcha' means charges for collection and 'raha' or allowance may be equivalent to *malikana*. Taking together, the share is not too high.

18 *Qistebandi* paper Mahals of zamindars with names. O.C. N. 57. Big bundle kept with Chittagong Collectorate Papers. Also see O.C. 61-65. Home Department, Record Branch, *ibid.*

TABLE 4

*Date—1188 B.S. (1783 A.D.) Place Calcutta*

| The Zamindari Mahal             | Name                           | Total revenue as specified |    |       |      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----|-------|------|
|                                 |                                | Rs.                        | A  | Ganda | Kara |
| Kismat Muragacha                | Krishna Kinkor Sarkar          | 10351                      | 9  | 11    | 1    |
|                                 | Karimullah                     | 6919                       | 0  | 00    |      |
|                                 | Prabduram Jatuk                | 7486                       | 8  | 15    |      |
|                                 | Devi Bhavani and Rammohan Roy  | 114                        | 3  | 3     |      |
| Kismat Pahargarh and Emandi (?) | Binod Roy Sikdar               | 12479                      | 14 | 6     |      |
| Kismat Magura                   | Darpanarayan Roy               | 5217                       | 3  | 17    | 2    |
|                                 | Ramchandra Roy                 | 641                        | 15 | 6     |      |
|                                 | Shyam Roy                      | 3425                       | 9  | 0     |      |
| Kismat Khaspur                  | Kalyonir                       | 327                        | 4  | 0     |      |
| Kismat Calcutta                 | Monohar Roy                    | 5764                       | 2  | 16    | 0    |
|                                 | Jayram Roy                     | 4104                       | 13 | 12    | 0    |
|                                 | Rajballav and Debicharan Roy   | 18454                      | 8  | 0     | 0    |
|                                 | Ramsaran and Krishnacharan Roy | 4580                       | 2  | 19    | 0    |
|                                 | Ram Ram Chakraborty            | 540                        | 7  | 9     | 0    |
|                                 | Rajballav Roy                  | 2034                       | 15 | 17    | 2    |
|                                 | Gokul Chandra Mitra            | 141                        | 9  | 0     | 0    |
|                                 | Ram Ram Roy                    |                            |    | ?     | 0    |
|                                 | Taradha Charan Roy             | 493                        | 15 | 4     |      |
|                                 | Nandeswar Roy                  | 429                        | 7  | 4     |      |

inheritors have no claim to this estate at any time. If anybody claims, he shall tell lies. In this manner I give *Khat* for the sale of estate, 1177 B.S. 3rd Bhadra."<sup>19</sup>

The records 'seemed to be sale deeds of *talugdari* rights.. However, quite a few interesting features can be gleaned from this type of records. First, in the sale and purchase of estates during the years of 1760s and 1770 it appears that there is not much direct transaction of money between the seller and purchaser.<sup>20</sup> There happened to be a rural money lender through whom the purchaser had to give money to the seller. It brings out an important function of the money lender in the rural society. The cause is probably that they had a tremendous control over hard cash in the villages<sup>21</sup> and the seller might insist on the payment in a particular coin like *siqqa* rupee which a moneylender could alone provide. It is also possible to get the names of the rural mahajans like the Bacharam Bandhopadhyaya, Saktiram Biswas, Mathur Poddar<sup>22</sup> etc. It shows that various castes from Subarnabanik to the Brahmins participated in money-lending business in the rural society of mid 18th Century Bengal.<sup>23</sup>

From these records it is also possible to have an idea of the value of the right over land as an economic asset. A table (no. 5) would show the point. The area was Pargana Balia and the period roughly was seventies of 18th century. The land was purchased by Ramtanu Mitra in the Pargana Balia at Hughli by various persons like Ishwari Dasi, Kanakram Mitra, Sayed Mahmud, Durga Ram Mitra, Ram Ram Mitra Cha[?] Ram Singh, Sahashra Ram Mitra and Man [?] Mitra.<sup>24</sup>

From the table it can be tentatively pointed out that the value of the superior right over the estate had a definitive rate in market and the jama happens to be fixed not arbitrarily; it had a 'proportionate

19 Sanad Registrar. Vol. XIX f. 3086.

20 Numerous other instances may be cited. *ibid*, f. 3072, 3101. Also see Sanad Register. Vol. III, f. 532.

21 Provincial Council of Revenue, Dacca. 8th May, 1775.

22 The names occur in *Sanad Register*, Vol. IX, f. 3081 f. 3101 and volume III, f. 532, respectively.

23 For similar situation in Rajasthan vide, Dilbagh Singh. "The Role of the Mahajans in the rural economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century", *Social Scientist*, May 1974, p. 20.

24 Sanad Register—Vol. XIX, f. 3072, f. 3072, f. 3074, f. 3079, f. 3081, f. 3082, f. 3084, f. 3086, f. 3087. Amidst these Syed Mahmud, no. 3 in the table, seems to make the sale under duress because he failed to give *malguzari* in time. f. 3078.



connection' with the price of the estate in market. Again, this proportionate rate may be compared with the rate of the sale of these taluqs after post—permanent settlement days.<sup>25</sup>

TABLE 5

*Statistics of land sale in Pargana Balid, Sarkar Satgaon,  
Hughli, B.S. 1174-78 (1777-1781 A.D.)*

| Date of<br>Sale B S | Assessed Revenue<br>(Tumar jama)<br>Rs. | Selling price<br>(Bikrir Dam)<br>Rs. | Assessed revenue<br>as % of selling<br>price |
|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1178                | 5.2                                     | 71.00                                | 7.3  |
| 1177                | 73.3                                    | 879.00                               | 8.3  |
| 1177                | 8.88                                    | 55.00                                | 16.0   |
| 1177                | 15.6                                    | 215.00                               | 7.3  |
| 1177                | 24.4                                    | 301.00                               | 8.1  |
| 1177                | 38.3                                    | 461.00                               | 8.3  |
| 1175                | 63.9                                    | 765.00                               | 8.4  |
| 1174                | 25.0                                    | 301.00                               | 8.3  |
| 1177                | 24.4                                    | 301.00                               | 8.1  |

The documents are also important for social history also because it pointed out the pattern of the transfer of *taluqs*. In this case, Ramanu Mira was purchaser of a number of estates and among the seellers there were also many 'Mitras'. Did he purchase estates from his *Shariq* (co-members of same family) and concentrate estate in his own individual hand?

25 Dr. Benoy Chowdhuri has already written a detailed paper on the sale of estate using the assessed revenue figure in relation to the price of the estate in the market for post permanent settlement days. *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, Jan to March, 1975. However, during our period, in making such an exhaustive table, many difficulties may arise. In Pargana Bora, Qismat Naihati and Chekrond, Hooghly, Ramshankar Basu purchased estates from the son's of Harekrishna Mukhopadhyaya, named as Debi Charan Mukhopadhyay, Ramsaran Mukhopadhyaya and Durgaram Mukhopadhyaya. All of them had a 14% share in their father's estate and the jama of their respective estate is same 23 Rs.—11 annas. The year of sale is 1777. But the estate was sold at various prices of Rs. 204, Rs. 119 and Rs. 224. The assessed revenue as % of different selling prices is 11.6, 19.9, 10.6 respectively. There may be certain extra-economic reasons like family disputes behind such sales. *ibid.* f. 3103, 3100, 3097.

From the papers on land-sales, it is possible to get other few interesting details about the *Mahajan*. The statement of Shobharam Das in favour of Debiprasad Roy may be interesting in this respect. In 1185 B.S. Sridhar Sharma and Faniram Sharma, two ryots, took from Anandiram Roy about Rs. 147 as loan. "After due to failure to repay the instalment he took loan from Radha Kanta Podar 7 *Sikka* Rs. and gave to Roy Mahashoy five *Sikka*". He failed to pay next instalment, "The Roy Mahasoy owed fifty to Sanaton Gandhabanik. He had a top (a kind of bill) from that banik for that loan. He gave that top to Sharma and promised to pay that loan to the banik [through them]". However, still the ryots failed to pay and the son of Anandi Roy, Debiprasad Roy was asked to seize his land. Instead "he merely used to take 67 rupees from the products of rice—sold at his eastern house".<sup>26</sup>

This document had few interesting points : first the nature of indebtedness in the rural area can be gauged. The peasant had to repay loans by taking further loans and if he once fell into the hand of one single money-lender, he, by the process, was bound to be the victim of other money-lenders. Secondly, it seems to be a custom among the Mahajans that they could change hand debtor from one to another for mutual adjustment of loans amongs themselves. It may lead to many implications. Suppose if a Mahajan was in a particular moment in need for hard cash, he could borrow that money from other money lenders by showing his debtors as a possible guarantee for repayment of loans. Thirdly, here, we find a moneylender who, instead of taking the possession of land directly, was satisfied with the sale-proceeds of the rice produced by the debtor who was selling it to him.

#### IV

The register on the revenue free lands give the information on the following items — number — kind of Sanad — who gives it — what is his right — the name of original grantee — the date of occupation — for which purpose given — for how many days — present holder — what is his relation with other persons — the area of land — at which date it is submitted — actual condition.

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<sup>26</sup> Volume of *Bainamas* Vol 1, 28 October 1779 to 16th July 1782 Dated 17 August 1781. Bishnupur, Sakin That Bhot, Pargona Hogla. f. 381, ..

A preliminary perusal of this register points out certain development. During very early days of the British rule the land grants made by the zamindars or other lesser authorities had to be confirmed by the collector. The land grants made by Tilokchandra Roy was signed by the collectorate Mariyat Saheb because Burdwan was one of the ceded districts.<sup>27</sup> In fact, both Mariyot and Tilok Roy were mentioned as the authorities who jointly granted land. This was certainly at variance with the Mughal custom.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, there are two categories—revenue free and rent free lands.<sup>29</sup> The revenue free lands like the *Brohmottar* did not pay any kind of revenue. But the lands which were given to the zamindar to his *ryots* in lieu of service had to pay an annual revenue at a lower rate to the government. It happened to be called as *Sabana Khazna*. The service lands like *Khairat*, *Bakshis*, *Chakran*, *Paikan*—all these lands being fallen into the categories of '*Pirpal*',—had to pay a revenue, however small, to the government. In 1757 a land of 50 Bighas had to pay a revenue of 104-10 annas whereas in 1751 39 bighas—12 Kathas had to pay a revenue 30 rupees—in the area of Birbhum.<sup>30</sup>

From these records it is also possible to show that there was an increase in the sale of the *Brohmottar* lands during 70s and 80s.<sup>31</sup> Being revenue free its sale price seemed to be less and to the rich classes in village it was, therefore, an lucrative item of purchase. By

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27 Vernacular Records Vol. 1, No 1103—1110, pp 85-87. In fact, the volume is a Baze Zamin Register.

28 Irfan Habib—*op. cit.*, pp. 315-316. He however, cited cases in Bengal and in Gujrat where time to time, the grants made by other persons than the emperor were resumed. But it seemed to be an unusual step as Shaista Khan revoked such order passed by Mir Jumla. However, N. K. Sinha has argued that the British official interference in *Madad-i-Ma'ash* began from the year 1772 only. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 270. But the register put the date much earlier in the ceded districts. One grant referred to 1764. The receiver was Nimai Bhattacharya of Haribati in Burdwan. No. 1103, register, Vol. 1, p. 87.

29 Cf. Ranajit Guha—*Introduction to West Bengal District Records—Burdwan*, New Series, letters issued (Ed. by R. Guha & A. Mitra), Cal. 1956, p. LXV.

30 Vernacular record Register, part II, No 1694, p 449 No. 1780 p. 559. Also see other references, No. 1786, p. 563, 1799, p. 573. No. 1888, p. 643, No. 1489, p. 607. This point is supported by other kinds of evidence from the vernacular records. O.C. 52 Settlement Department—Board of Revenue. 1190 B.S. 1783. "Big Bundle" *op. cit.*

31 According to the tradition of the Mughal administration, these lands could not be sold. But during the 18th century, the rule was not observed. Habib, *op. cit.*, p. 304, f. 733.

these records, it is possible to find a pattern of sale of such lands to various persons whose family became 'illustrious' zamindar in future. For example, One Ramjoy Sharma was selling, in 1785, 14 *bighas* of *Brohmottar* land to Jagmohan Roy, the ancestor of Rammohan Roy in Mauja Radhanagar Pargana Jahanabad, Chakla Burdwan.<sup>32</sup>

## V

It is very difficult to explain the nature miscellenous records because these are varied in character and are scattered in various volumes. It is possible to get a glimpse into fragments of merchant papers. It one such paper shows that a merchant (his name could not be read because of the damaged condition of paper) were bringing various pieces of cloth (high priced) to Calcutta roughly amounting to 600 rupees.<sup>33</sup>

From this record it is possible to know prices of various cloth piece-goods at the market of Benaras. For example, Duria 10 *haths* costs per piece 25 rupees, Abkhor per piece 10 *haths* costs 55 rupees, Do-patta 9 *haths* per piece 16 rupees chinese Satin per 2 piece 27 rupees etc.

The most interesting piece of these papers examined so far is a number of files regarding rural taxes and exactions other than land revenue. These documents related to the area of *Bagri*, the most fertile portion of Murshidabad. In market the Kayal (who weighs the goods) receives "one puya per man" i.e. 1/160th part of the good. The half of it was taken by the government. The makers of alcohol used to give taxes from 1 rupees to 6 rupees depending upon their sale. If in jungle the cows grazed during the four monts of rainy seasons, per cow-shed (*Gohal*) monthly one-rupee and four annas was charged as Ghas-Kar (tax on grass) and payable to government or to zamindar depending upon the locality.<sup>34</sup> Timber from forest was also taxable and out of 100 rupees from the sale of proceeds of wood 75 rupees had to be submitted to government.

In the twice cropped land half of the produce was taken by government. It is also interesting to note that "in order to produce

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32 Vernacular Records, Vol. II, No. 1456, p. 32. Other cases of sale No. 1452, p. 313, 1459, p. 311 No. 1553, No. 1901, 1554, p. 385-387.

33 O.C. 50. Board of Revenue, Settlement Department, Big Bundle No. 1-132.

*Boro* crops, the government employed persons with money" and in Bagri such land amounted to two to three thousand bighas.<sup>35</sup>

There is another cess payable to government or zamindar depending upon locality. In a village if there was a marriage, the tax payable by that village, in case of man, 1 rupee 8 annas and in case of woman 2 rupees 4 annas.

If there was any partition of the property among the brothers, one portion would be taken by government. It was used to be called as *Bhayadebati*.

By the law of *Aputrak Mauta*, the property of the persons who died without heirs was taken by the government.

Though it has been admitted that "in pargana the ryots engaged in growing mulberry and preparing the land for mulberry used to pay revenue", after "the sale of silk to pycar" "every mulberry cultivator had to give 7 [ ] anna—6 tola of silk" and that was sold by the government in market. The sugar-cane growers also had to pay similar executions. (*Sankar jama*).<sup>36</sup>

The custom of paying *selami* or a kind of quit rent has been already referred. In *Chakran Mahal*, annual rate was one rupee; in the *Paikar Mahal*, the paik who was engaged in collection of *Khazna*, get 10 Bighas and had to pay 3 annas as "Malgujari" per bigha. In other kinds of service lands called *Sagrid Peshwa*, per 20,30,50 bighas the *selami* rate is 5 rupees, 7 rupees, 10 rupees. Even the *Mohottoran* (lands granted rent free to non Brahmin classes), had to pay per bigha 4 annas. These cesses added to the high land revenue demand made the fiscal burden unbearable and made the demand of government pervasive over every possible economic activity. Even the petty traders had to give *tola* at the rural markets as it is written "In pargana there are weekly markets (hats) and *golas* fallen under *sayer*. From each and every good a portion is taken and is sold in market".<sup>37</sup>

34 O.C. 53 1190/1783 B.S. *ibid*.

35 O.C. 54 *ibid*.

36 O.C. 52, 1190/1783. *ibid*.

37 O.C. 51, *ibid*. For a similar account of exaction of cesses other than land revenue, see Habib, *op. cit.*, pp 243-248. Cf. Harbans Mukhia—"Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans, and Menials in 18th Century Eastern Rajasthan." (Mimeo).

Thus in conclusion, it may be said that a number of informations may be gleaned from these records. A thorough search might, lead, to the discovery of the new facts. However, the usefulness of the Bengali records as a source can have been more fruitful if there is an effort to collect and analysis the papers left at various district collectorate. Again only in the context of the materials incorporated in other languages, the information from these documents, can be fitted into a general pattern.

## IMPERIALISM OF OPIUM IN ASSAM : 1773—1921

AMALENDU GUHA

How the British-Indian opium monopoly was operated for more than a century since its creation in 1773, to suit the needs of Britain's China trade and to finance colonial governance, are facts which are well-known.\* What is less known is its ruinous impact on the British-Indian province of Assam, particularly five of its districts—Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, which together came to be known as Assam proper. An attempt will be made in this paper (i) to trace the genesis of the opium evil in Assam in course of 1773-1826—the years of early Anglo-Assamese relations and (ii) to examine the extent of the evil in post-annexation Assam till 1921. The purpose is to understand why anti-opium agitation became the main edge of the national struggle against imperialism in Assam during its last phase, 1921-1947. The opium policy was imperialism's weakest link where the nationalists struck hard.

### *A By-product of Anglo-Assamese Relations*

The Assamese people were introduced to the poppy plant and its use during the days of the Mughal invasion of Assam in the seventeenth century. However opium-addiction remained a vice limited only to a few rich men there until the middle of the next

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\* An earlier version of the paper was presented at the Indian History Congress, Calicut, Dec. 1976.

Warren Hastings transferred the opium monopoly from the account of merchandise to that of revenue. He did not find it wrong to vend the drug as an item of foreign commerce. Throughout the 19th century, this monopoly remained a clever and effective imperial device for meeting the needs of the so-called remittance problem and Britain's multilateral balance of payments. Besides, the opium revenue constituted one-seventh to one-sixth of India's total budgetary revenue until the early 1880s. In the middle decades of the 19th century, opium accounted for one-third to one-fourth of India's total foreign trade value. The working of opium imperialism in the context of Assam alone is however discussed in this paper.

century.<sup>1</sup> According to Maniram Dewan, an early nineteenth century chronicler, poppy was first cultivated by Rajput Barkendazes at Beltola (in the vicinity of Gauhati) during the reign of King Lakshmi Simha (1769-1780)<sup>2</sup>. They and hundreds of other armed Barkendazes from Bengal Presidency—many of them ex-sepoys of the Company and opium addicts—had flocked to civil war-ridden 18th-century Assam as soldiers of fortune. It was through their agency that the opium habit spread through its length and breadth. Thomas Welsh, who commanded the East India Company's interventionist troops during the period from November 1772 to May 1774, observed that poppy was "growing in luxuriance in most of the lower provinces" of Assam and that the reigning monarch, Gaurinath Simha (1780-95), was an opium addict.<sup>3</sup>

The Assamese were not yet acquainted with the manufacture of 'merchantable opium' that could be locally procured in considerable quantity. Welsh therefore recommended that "a few boat-loads of opium" be sent from Bengal for sale.<sup>4</sup> It was later widely believed that Welsh's several hundred sepoy were primarily responsible for spreading the opium habit in Assam.<sup>5</sup> That the Company's sepoy had a role to play, particularly in eastern or upper Assam, cannot be denied. Haliram Dhekial-Phukan's observation in 1829 that the drug habit had become particularly rampant in course of the preceding three to four decades also supports this conclusion.<sup>6</sup> Barkendaz freebooters and Welsh's sepoy apart, a large number of Hindustani-ex-sepoy from Bengal, who were recruited into the army of King Kamaleswar Simha (1795-1811), also played a similar role in popularizing the opium habit and poppy cultivation. Thus the cultivation.

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1 Maniram Dewan, *Buranji-viveka-ratna*, Vol. 2 (manuscript chronicle in Assamese, 1838; transcript at the Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati), pp. 424-5.

2 A. J. Moffat Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam* (Calcutta, 1854), Sibsagar—p. 75.

3 Capt. Welsh to John Shore, 12 Feb. 1774, *Foreign Political*, 24 February 1774 No. 13A (NAI); also Welsh to Cornwallis, 4 Feb. 1773, *Bengal Political Consultations*, 15 Feb. 1773, No. 15.

4 Ibid.

5 Capt. John Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam* (London, 1854), p. 246; also John Leslie, Asst. Surgeon at Gauhati to the Secy. to Medical Board, 8 Dec. 1830, *Foreign Political*, 15 April 1831, No. 94 (NAI).

6 Haliram Dhekial-Phukan, *Asam Buranji* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 1829, Jatindramohan Bhattacharya, ed. reprint), p. 110.



of poppy extended gradually eastward beyond the British district of Rungpore. In 1809, Buchanan Hamilton did not fail to note that opium in Assam was "raised in abundance for consumption and there is much used".<sup>7</sup>

Not much of Bengal opium did however find its way to Assam before its annexation under the Treaty of Yandabo, 1826, or thereafter till the 1850s. The expanding demand for opium was satisfied from local supplies. The drug used to be collected by saturating strips of coarse cotton cloth—each about three inches broad—in the juice obtained from incisions made into the poppy plant. Dried and lightly rolled up, these strips of cloth, known as *Kanee*, were sold in the market or were consumed by the producers themselves. Poorer people prepared a drink by dissolving this *Kanee* in water. Richer people extracted *madak* from it by evaporating the water, and they smoked it.<sup>8</sup> Drinking was however more common than smoking.

Given the vicissitudes of the China trade, the Company needed also other markets close at hand where the surplus opium, if any, could be sold. Assam provided such a market. In fact, some quantity of illicit opium used to be smuggled into Assam proper from Rungpore that included Goalpara in those days.<sup>9</sup> To regularize the trade, poppy cultivation that had long remained an exclusive preserve of select Banaras and Bihar districts was permitted for an experiment in the districts of Bengal proper as well, under Regulation XIII of 1816. A Commercial Resident in special charge of opium was appointed at Rungpore.<sup>10</sup> As exportation of Rungpore opium to China, was not allowed because of its inferior quality, it found its way to adjacent Assam proper in trickles. After four years of trial, the permissive regulations were withdrawn, and the Company's opium

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7 Francis Hamilton, *An Account of Assam with some notices concerning the neighbouring territories first compiled in 1807-1814* (S. K. Bhuyan, ed. Gauhati, 1940), p. 59.

8 G. Lamb, Surgeon, from Dacca to the Secy. to Medical Board, 30 March 1831, *Foreign Political*, 15 April 1832, No. 93A (NAI); also Dhekial-Phukkan, n. 6, p. 110.

9 *Board of Trade* (Opium)—Progs. No. 1, 14 January 1817 cited in B. C. Barui, "The Smuggling Trade of Opium in the Bengal Presidency 1793-1817", *Bengal Past and Present*, XCIV, No. 139 (July-Dec.), 1975, pp. 123-4.

10 George Watt, *A Dictionary of Economic Products of India*, Vol. 6, Part I (1892; reprint 1972), pp. 59-60.

establishment at Rungpore was abolished.<sup>11</sup> But the illicit opium trade nevertheless continued.

The only check on the rapid extension of poppy cultivation in pre-British Assam at the beginning of the 19th century appears to have been a tax of Rs. 12/- per *pura* (1 *pura*=1.33 acres) of such cultivation.<sup>12</sup> Apparently, this check was hardly effective. For immediately after its annexation, the extent of poppy cultivation in Assam was estimated by David Scott at some 2,000 *puras*.<sup>13</sup> Three years later Haliram Dhekial-Phukan noted in 1829 that there was almost no place in Assam where poppy was not cultivated.<sup>14</sup> At an estimated average yield of 10 seers per *pura*, the total production of opium from 2,000 *puras* was likely to be 500 maunds or so—quite an enormous quantity for the local population of one million.<sup>15</sup> In other words, opium consumption in Assam proper was at the rate of some 200 seers per 10,000 population, while only 6 seers would have sufficed for all medicinal needs of the people.<sup>16</sup> The relieving feature of this alarming situation was that, with its lesser consistency, *kane* was less harmful than Bengal opium. The Assamese habit of taking the drug mostly in forms other than smoking also made it less injurious to health.

The Company had to decide whether the annexed territory was to be brought under the general operation of the opium monopoly or whether an exception was to be made in view of its peculiar local circumstances. Prohibition of poppy cultivation and introduction of strict *abkari* regulations in Assam proper were not favoured by David

11. Watt, n. 10, pp. 59-60; also *Board of Trade* (Opium)—Progs. No. 1, 14 January 1817, n. 9.

12. Maniram Dewan's petition to A. J. Moffat Mills, 1853 cited in *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report* (Jorhat, 1925), p. 19.

13. *Bengal Secret and Political Consultations*, 9 March 1827, No. 18, Scott to Swinton, 28 Feb. 1827 cited in N. K. Baroah, *David Scott in North-East India 1802-1831: A Study in British Paternalism* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 101. Scott's estimate was obviously based on a quick survey of land records in 1825-26, and hence appears to be fairly correct.

14. Dhekial-Phukkan, n. 6, p. 109.

15. The average yield is that of Nowgong as given for 1847 by Butler, n. 5, p. 244. The population figure is an upward revision of the results of Assam's first census carried out by David Scott in 1826. Dhekial-Phukkan, n. 6, pp. 74-75. See also n. 26 below.

16. League of Nations norm cited by C. F. Andrews, *The Opium Evil in India; Britain's Responsibility* (London, 1926), p. 22.

Scott, the first Agent to the Governor-General for the North East Frontier. For the local opium-addicted population would have then faced serious health hazards and a high mortality rate. Instead, he recommended a tax of rupees twenty per *pura* of local poppy cultivation.<sup>17</sup> He also pleaded for the expediency of allowing a part of the Company's opium investment to be furnished from Assam, should the locally prepared drug appear upon trial to be of good quality. For this purpose, he recommended cash advances to poppy cultivators, as and when necessary.<sup>18</sup> In his report on Assam, dated 22 July 1833, Francis Jenkins, too, advised against sudden restrictions on the poppy cultivation and recommended a tax on it, to be enhanced gradually over eight, ten or more years until "the province should be subjected to the general laws of the state in regard to opium".<sup>19</sup>

The official assessment of the situation was well-informed. A sudden ban on the poppy cultivation would have certainly produced some unforeseen results as well. Within two decades of the annexation, tax payments in cash had gradually been substituted for all payments in kind and labour-rent.<sup>20</sup> Due to extremely inadequate commercialization of agriculture, tax-payers were already hard-pressed for cash. If the cultivation of poppy—an important cash crop<sup>21</sup>—were suppressed, the problem of cash-shortage would have been more acute on two counts :—(i) many cultivators would have then lost a major source of their cash income and (ii) many people, used to home-grown opium, would have needed additional cash to buy *abkari* opium.

### *Frying Pan to Fire*

Under the circumstances, the policy of allowing local poppy cultivation until 1 May 1860 was understandable. But why the poppy fields were not subjected to a tax higher than the ordinary land

17 Scott to Swinton, 28 Feb. 1827, cited by Barooah, n. 12, p. 101.

18 Scott to Swinton, 17. April 1830, *Foreign Political*, 7 May 1830, No. 51 (NAI).

19 Jenkins to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 22 July 1833, Para 58, *Foreign Political* 11 Feb. 1835, No. 90 (NAI).

20 Exaction of a labour-rent was the mainstay of the erstwhile revenue system of the Ahom Kings.

21 Poppy was said to be the only crop regularly and constantly watered from small reservoirs.—Edward Thornton, *Gazetteer of the Territories under the Government of the East India Company*, Vol. 1 (London, 1854), pp. 165-6. Cash advances were regularly distributed amongst the poppy growers by the traders for ensuring deliveries of *kanee*.

revenue rate, as proposed by Scott, Jenkins and even by the Board of Trade, was not clear. It was believed that if the Bengal opium was introduced by the Government and sold cheaper than *kaneë*, the acreage under poppy in Assam proper would automatically shrink. Accordingly, arrangements were made to sell Bengal opium through the government treasuries during the late forties and throughout the 1850s, but without much success.<sup>22</sup>

The prevalent opium policy was widely discussed at the official level, when A. J. Moffat Mills, Judge of the Sadar Dewani and Nizamat Adalat of Calcutta, visited the province in 1853 to enquire into the local conditions. That the opium habit had already crossed the danger level in Assam was pinpointed by many of his memorialists. "The universal use of opium has converted the Assamese, once a hardy, industrious and enterprising race", said Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, "into an effeminate, weak, indolent and a degraded people." He demanded that the sale of government opium be discontinued forthwith and a tax on the poppy cultivation be introduced and progressively enhanced with a view to its gradual eradication.<sup>23</sup> Maniram Dewan too deprecated the introduction of *abkari* opium since, under its spell, people were "daily becoming unfit for agricultural pursuits." He recommended a policy of gradual eradication of the poppy culture, through an annual five per cent decrease in the acreage.<sup>24</sup>

Mills was convinced that "three-fourths of the population are opium eaters and men, women and children alike use the drug".<sup>25</sup> Reports received from the Collectors indicated, in no uncertain terms, that the sale of government opium had not discouraged local poppy cultivation. On the contrary, it had almost tripled to about 6,000 puras (yielding some 1,500 maunds of *kaneë*) since the British took over the administration. While the population increased hardly 10 per cent or so between 1826 and 1853,<sup>26</sup> the consumption of *kaneë*

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22 Memorandum of Lt. Col. Mathie (not dated) in Mills Report, n. 2, Appendix D, pp. XVI-XVIII.

23 Anandaram Dhekial-Phukan, "Observations on the administration of Assam", Mills' Report, n. 2, Appendix J—pp. XXXI-LX.

24 Maniram Dewan's petition, dated 1853, appended to the report on Sibsagar, Mills' Report, n. 2.

25 Mills' Report, n. 2, pp. 19-20.

26 The early data on cultivated acreage and population were based on field enquiries, but nevertheless suffered from an under-coverage. David Scott's census of 1826 put the population of Assam proper at 7 to 8 lacs (Dhekial-Phukkan; n. 6, pp. 74-75). This we have revised to one million. For

per 10,000 of population recorded no doubt an alarming increase during this first quarter-century of the British rule. On the top of it, one to two hundred maunds of Bengal opium, sold by the Government, were also consumed. Having admitted the universality of the drug addiction, Mills concluded: "The use of opium with many has almost become a necessary of life, and in a damp country like Assam it is perhaps beneficial if taken with moderation . . .". While upholding the sale of government opium as legitimate, he however conceded that "to allow every man to grow the plant and manufacture the drug unrestrictedly is most injurious to the morals of the people. Opium they should have, but to get it they should be made to work for it".<sup>27</sup> A policy of gradual eradication of the poppy cultivation by means of an increasing assessment on lands cultivated with poppy did not find favour with him. His recommendation was that "the simplest and most effectual plan is to suppress the cultivation at once and pour into the stations and into the Mofussil, at certain places, a sufficient quantity of government opium for the consumption of the people".<sup>28</sup> In plain words, Mills was not concerned with the short-term effects on the people of whatever official opium policy was adopted. He also wanted the Government to exploit the peoples' weakness for the drug to augment its revenues.

Because of the resistance of a section of officials with spot experience, Mills' recommendation was not given an immediate effect. However, British tea planters as a class were clamouring for a ban on opium. For they then believed that opium had made the Assamese people too lazy to come for work in the labour-short plantations.<sup>29</sup>

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1853, the population estimate was 1061,513 (Mills' *Report*, n. 2, Appendix A)—obviously an under-estimate since, for more than one district, back-dated figures were given. In 1872, Assam proper had a population of 1,496,705.

Acreage under poppy in 1852-53 was as follows :

| District    | Darrang | Nowgong | Sibsagar | Lakhimpur | Total |
|-------------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|-------|
| Cultivation |         |         |          |           |       |
| (Pura)      | 1271    | 1993    | 1311     | 1175      | 5750  |

Source: collated from district reports and appendices in Mills' *Report*, n.2. No figures are available for Kamrup. One Pura = 1.33 acres approximately.

<sup>27</sup> Mills' *Report* n.2, pp. 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Assam planters' suggestions to Col. F. Jenkins, *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal*, Vol. 37 (1859), p. 71.

Government finally banned poppy cultivation with effect from 1 May 1860 and allowed the Government monopoly of opium to operate in full force. In 1864-65, the total quantum of Bengal opium sold in the Assam Valley (Assam proper and Goalpara) amounted to 1939 maunds.<sup>30</sup> The relevant revenue derived from the opium excise, (Rs. 1186,413), was more than what was collected in that year under the head of land revenue (Rs. 1016,009).<sup>31</sup> In a drive to maximize the excise revenue with a minimum of consumption, the price of opium was increased from Rs. 14 per seer in 1860 to Rs. 20 in 1862 and Rs. 23 by 1873.<sup>32</sup>

The Assam districts were separated from Bengal to form a new province in February 1874. While poppy cultivation remained prohibited, a brisk trade in government opium went on unhindered. For less than 7,000 villages and towns of the Assam Valley in 1873-74, there were as many as 5,137 licensed opium shops to vend the drug at the grass-roots.<sup>33</sup> The vendors' list did even include a few European tea planters. S. E. Peal, e.g., used to issue every month about 40 lbs of opium to his Assamese labour force. For about 12 years since 1863, this constituted half of his total wage bill and served as circulating media reportedly over a rural area of 200 square miles where from his labour was recruited.<sup>34</sup>

*New Policy in Operation : 'maximum revenue with minimum consumption'*

The official policy in operation was one of revenue-maximization while progressively reducing the supply of opium. Two measures were adopted to achieve this end—(i) a gradual increase in the wholesale price of opium over the years and (ii) a gradual reduction in

30 *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (New Edn., 1908), Vol. 6. p. 94.

31 *Arunoday* (Assamese periodical), Vol. 22, January 1867.

The district-wise breakdown of the opium excise revenue from the Assam valley was as follows :

|      |         |         |         |          |           |          |
|------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Dt : | Kamrup  | Darrang | Nowgong | Sibsagar | Lakhimpur | Goalpara |
| Rs.  | 223,359 | 200,135 | 247,885 | 382,427  | 29,836    | 102,771  |

32 J. J. S. Driberg, "Appendix XXX—historical account of the administration of opium in Assam" in Royal Commission on Opium, *Reports and Minutes of Evidences* 1893, Vol. 2, p. 140; *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report*, n.12, p. 23.

33 *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report*, n.12, p. 20.

34 Evidence of Peal on 7 Dec. 1893, Royal Commission on Opium, n.32, p. 153. The other two opium-vending planters who gave evidence were E. P. Gilman and E. Bridge, *ibid.*, pp. 293 and 296.

the number of vending licenses issued. Besides, the drastic increase in land revenue rates (once in 1868 and again in 1893 in the face of popular resistance) was officially justified as an effective disincentive to opium consumption.<sup>35</sup> The number of opium shops was brought down from 5,137 in 1873-74 to 1,397 by 1880-81 and 775 by 1901-02. By 1919-20, it came down to 324. Alongside of this, the wholesale price (treasury price) of opium was gradually pushed upward to Rs. 37 per seer by 1890-91, at which level it was allowed to remain till 1908-9. It was again gradually pushed up to Rs. 50 in 1918-19 and to Rs. 57 in 1920-21.

These measures no doubt ensured a steadily increasing excise revenue. These also caused a steady reduction in the province's total opium consumption until the end of the nineteenth century. The consumption came down steadily from 1,874 maunds in 1875-76 to 1,228 maunds by 1897-98—apparently an impressive fall in view of the concurrent population increase; or, even otherwise. However for a proper comprehension of the intensity of the opium evil, the focus should be not on the whole province, but on Assam proper alone. It was there that more than 90 per cent of the province's opium consumption was concentrated. Besides, the opium habit there was almost exclusively associated with the indigenous agricultural population.<sup>36</sup> When these facts are taken into consideration, the reduction in opium consumption during the last quarter of the nineteenth century hardly appears impressive and meaningful.

The population of Assam proper increased 16.3 per cent while the quantum of opium consumed there declined 22.9 per cent (from 1557 maunds to 1201 maunds), between the years 1880-81 and 1900-01. The entire population increase took place in the non-indigenous, i.e., the immigrant sector of the population which was known to be almost

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35 Speech by P. G. Melitus, *East Bengal and Assam Legislative Council Proceedings*, 6 April 1909, p. 80.

The prevalent land revenue rates were doubled in 1868 and were again increased by one-third, on the average, with effect from 1893 in Assam proper.

36, *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report*, n.12, pp. 15 and 36. Non-Assamese plantation workers began to be slowly affected only since 1905. Out of 201 tea garden managers replying to the Botham Committee in 1913, only 24 reported that 5 per cent or more of their labour force were addicted to opium and only 53 reported that the use of opium in their tea gardens was increasing.—ibid, p. 33. See also Reports of the Excise Department, Govt. of Assam, particularly for the years 1906-07, 1913-14 and 1918-19.

entirely free from this vice. The relevant indigenous component of the population, on the other hand, underwent an estimated 9.7 per cent decline, according to the Census authorities. This means that the fall in per capita opium consumption of the relevant population was a little above 13 per cent—or at the most 15 per cent—over the two decades.<sup>37</sup> Even this was doubtful. For, as a result of the price increase and inadequacy of the anti-smuggling measures, the use of smuggled opium was on the increase.

Within these limitations, the downward trend in opium consumption was nevertheless welcome and should have been maintained in the subsequent period. But this did not happen. Within a couple of years, the trend was reversed. The consumption of opium in the province went on increasing from a low 1228 maunds in 1897-98 and 1901-02 to 1748 maunds in 1919-20. Assam proper accounting for the bulk of the increase as usual. Thus under the official policy, practically no progress was made since 1897-98 in reducing the absolute quantum of opium consumption either in Assam proper or in the province, as a whole, until the Non-cooperation days.

The reason is not far to seek. Revenue considerations did not permit more drastic and frequent upward price revisions and larger expenditures on anti-smuggling measures. Reduction in opium supplies was permitted only as long as it tended to increase the yield; otherwise, the supply was allowed to increase at the given price. Not welfare but a monopolist's profit-maximizing price policy was what guided the Government in this matter. The price set at Rs. 37 in 1890-91, e.g., was kept unchanged for 19 years, so that an apprehended fall in the excise receipts could be averted. For five of the 19 years, the revenue derived was indeed actually less than what it was in 1890-91; for the rest, the increase in revenue until 1908-09 was obviously not deemed big and steady enough to justify a further increase in the price.

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37 The decrease in population was due to the *Kalazar* epidemic. The Census authorities estimated the indigenous population on the basis of the list of indigenous tribes and Hindu castes and found that it decreased 5.4 per cent between 1881 and 1891 and 6.4 per cent between 1891 and 1901—Census of India, 1901, 1901, Vol. 4, *Assam—Part I Report* (Shillong, 1902), pp. 27-30.

Recalculated on the basis of the list of indigenous linguistic groups, the cumulative decline over the two decade appears to have been 7.7 per cent. See *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report*, n.12, pp. 14 and 97.



The situation eased thereafter, and several price revisions helped augment the opium excise revenue. As a result of this policy, the total consumption of opium in 1919-20 was at its highest since 1875-76 and was only 6.7 per cent less than the consumption of the latter year. The revenue therefrom more than trebled meanwhile. In 1920-21, the eve of the Non-cooperation movement, the province's consumption of opium underwent a slight fall (from 1748 maunds to 1615 maunds) over the previous year's; but, because of another price increase meanwhile, the revenue yield increased to Rs. 4.4 million—an all-time record figure, later surpassed only by that of 1925-26.

The management of the excise revenue was vested in the provincial governments and, in Assam, its importance was only next to that of land revenue. Even as late as the early 1920s, opium revenue accounted for about one-sixth of the province's total budgetary revenue.<sup>38</sup> The Government of Assam used to receive opium at the ex-factory cost of Rs. 7.25 per seer until June 1895 and Rs. 8.50 for many years thereafter. The margin between this cost and the treasury price indicated the amount of excise duty paid by the retailers.<sup>39</sup> The difference between the treasury price and the retail price was the private vendor's gross profit. The monopoly price could always be pitched higher in Assam than in other provinces, because of a reportedly lesser danger of smuggling, far removed as the province was from the source of illicit Malwa opium.

During the period from 1880-81 to 1920-21, there was a slow decline in opium consumption over the years; but this hardly means

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38 For example, the government revenue structure during the three years, 1921-22 to 1923-24, was as follows :

|         | Total Revenue<br>(Rs. 1000) | Excise Revenue<br>(Opium included)<br>(Rs. 1000) | Opium Revenue<br>(Rs. 1000) |
|---------|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 1921-22 | 24333                       | 6158   | 3917                        |
| 1922-23 | 21888                       | 5681   | 3586                        |
| 1923-24 | 22565                       | 6225   | 3810                        |
|         | <hr/> 68786                 | <hr/> 18064                                      | <hr/> 11313                 |
|         | (100)                       | (26.2)   | (16.4)                      |

39 Driberg, n.32, p. 454. From 1894-95, the grower received a price of Rs. 6 a seer and by 1922-23, this price gradually increased to Rs. 15 a seer. Accordingly, the ex-factory cost of opium also went on increasing.

that per capita consumption was declining in the indigenous population. From 1890-91 onwards the vice was, on the contrary, perhaps steadily increasing amongst them in per capita terms. And by 1920-21, the annual intake of opium per 10,000 people was as high as an estimated 287 seers, as against an internationally approved norm of 6 seers. Until 1920-21, addiction to opium was typically a vice of the rural people—the peasantry in general. It was only in the early years of the twentieth century that some immigrant plantation workers, too, were introduced to the vice, by licence-holding Marwari traders, “one of whom is to be found on almost every tea garden”.<sup>40</sup> The extent to which the vice prevailed in a few tea gardens was alarming.<sup>41</sup> For this drug was presumably given also to children so that they remained doped at home while their working mothers were away on duty. At this juncture, Gandhiji who heralded the action-oriented, anti-opium agitation as an integral part of the national struggle in Assam, was hailed overnight as an *avatar* by the Assamese people. He taught that anti-opium and anti-imperialist struggles in Assam were inseparable from each other.

#### *Anti-Opium Agitation : Prayers and Petitions*

Any organized anti-opium agitation in Assam was conspicuously absent during the nineteenth century. The enlightened section of the people did however feebly exhibit their awareness of the alarming situation. This was evident from the memoranda of Maniram Dewan and Anandaram Dhekial-Phukan to Mills in 1853. In his satire, *Kaniar Kirtan*, published in 1861, Hemchandra Barua posed opium as a menace to the Assamese society. Resident American baptist missionaries too focused on this evil from time to time in their Assamese mouthpiece, *Arunoday* (1846-82). Amongst others, Satyanath Bora and Trinayan Barkakati, both lawyers, Gunabhiram Barua, retired government servant, and Radhanath Changkakati, owner of a printing press—they all told the Royal Commission on Opium (1893) to prohibit the drug. Changkakati even suggested that the resultant loss of revenue could be made up “by curtailing civil and military expenditure and Home charges.”<sup>42</sup>

40 *Report of the Excise Dept.*, GA, 1906-07, p. 15.

41 *Ibid.*

The Excise Report of 1926-27 notes that 261 tea garden coolies were newly given permits as consumers in that year.

42 Royal Commission on Opium n.32, pp. 265-6, 286 and 305-8.

On the other hand, Jagannath Barua, Devicharan Barua, Mahendranath Phukan and Munsii Rahamat Ali, all planters, Madhavchandra Bardoloi, high-ranking government servant, Haribilas Agarwala, opulent merchant—they all gave support to the government policy then in operation.<sup>43</sup> Jagannath Barua believed in the officially cultivated myth that opium was “a necessity in a jungly and malarious province like Assam” and that the question of temperance should be left “to the voluntary efforts on the part of the people.”<sup>44</sup> The Jorhat Sarbojanik Sabha, of which he and Devicharan Barua were the mentors, opposed the idea of prohibition and even upheld the policy of exporting opium to China. Their memorandum to the Commission also asserted: “the people of this province are not and would not be willing to make up [for]..... any deficit in the revenues...” resulting from prohibition. One of their arguments, was that tribal Kachari labourers, who used opium for the most part, were the hardiest and healthiest of all labour on the Upper Assam plantations.<sup>45</sup> Clearly it was the dread of an increase in land taxation that induced the dominant section of the Assamese landed middle class to take a pro-government stand on the opium issue.

Even at the national level, there was no united and organized anti-opium platform. Dadabhai Naoroji and a few others apart, the national leaders hardly realized that the British opium policy was an integral part of the network of imperialism. Concerned only with its moral aspect, they were ready to compromise their conscience if that suited India's interests. While some—the Brahmo elite e.g.—were in favour of a total prohibition on humanitarian grounds, a majority of them apparently found nothing wrong in fleecing China to augment Indian public revenues.<sup>46</sup> They were also the least aware that opium was no less a curse of their own people in Assam than of the Chinese. The danger at home of a rising consumption of opium was rarely focussed in the contemporary Indian press.

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43 Ibid, pp. 266-7, 296-9, 300-5 and 462.

44 Ibid, pp. 295 and 298 for the quotes.

45 “Humble memorial of Jorhat Sarbojanik Sabha”, Royal Commission on Opium, n.32, Appendix XXXVI, p. 462. In course of his evidence, Haribilas Agarwala, said: “Opium-eaters take opium to enable them to perform their work.”, *ibid*, pp. 266-7.

46 For Indian leaders' attitude see Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India : Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership 1880-1905* (Delhi, 1906 ; reprinted 1969), pp. 563-571.

The Raj faced the fiercest criticism of its opium policy in the metropolitan country itself. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the tirade against the opium monopoly remained an integral part of the free trade agitation. But as its imperial role found increasing recognition and acceptance soon amongst the free traders,<sup>47</sup> the mantle of the anti-opium agitation fell on the Christian philanthropists. By 1888 the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade was at the head of this agitation, and it had support of the democratic sections of the British people. Because of its pressure on the British Parliament, the Royal Commission on Opium was appointed in 1893 to investigate the question.

Many shocking facts about the situation in Assam came to light thereafter. The legal supply apart, some quantities of contraband opium were also being regularly smuggled into Assam from Rajputana and other areas by Marwari and Nepali traders.<sup>48</sup> Dwarkanath Ganguli, assistant secretary to the Indian Association of Calcutta, told the Commission of his first-hand impression that about a quarter of the population of the Assam Valley—and no less than 40 per cent of its male population—were addicted to opium. The Commissioner of Excise, J. J. S. Driberg, who was in Assam since 1864, estimated that 30 to 35 per cent of the Assamese-speaking population and 80 to 85 per cent of the Mikir tribe indulged in opium. The Lalungs (a tribe) of Nowgong also were much under its spell.<sup>49</sup>

Lower classes generally spent, according to a pleader of Nowgong, 10 to 20 per cent of their income on opium. Changkakati observed in 1893 that some veteran consumers in the district of Lakhimpur spent up to about one-half of their income on the drug.<sup>50</sup> These

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47 For example, J. R. McCulloch "was ultimately prepared to make some compromise in his commitment to full-blooded *laissez faire* in the case of the procurement and distribution of opium" and recommended in 1863 a policy of revenue maximization through its monopoly pricing.—W. J. Barber, *British Economic Thought and India 1600-1853 : A Study of the History of Development Economics* (Oxford, 1975), p. 186.

48 Evidence of Driberg on 27 Dec. 1893, Royal Commission on Opium, n.32, p. 277.

49 Evidences of Ganguli and Driberg, *ibid*, pp. 248 and 275, respectively. According to the latter, the Kachari tribe in 1893 could not be stamped as opium eaters. *Ibid*, p. 261. However, by 1908-09 the situation changed. The Excise Report for the year noted the prevalence of the opium habit amongst them to a regrettable extent.

50 Evidence of Ramdurlabh Mazumdar of Nowgong on 24 November 1893, Royal Commission on Opium, n.32, pp. 60-62 and Changkakati, *ibid*, p. 305.

observations gave only a rough idea of the proportion of household income spent on opium. Out of 38 households of toiling peasants covered by an enquiry in 1888 in Assam proper, as many as 11 were regular buyers of the drug. The more detailed information available for four of these revealed further that, on the average, more than a quarter of their cash requirements were for purchasing opium while only 9 per cent related to the land revenue demand.<sup>51</sup>

Government's excise policy hit the Assamese peasant society hard not only economically, but also morally. The habit of taking the drug in its most injurious form, i.e., smoking, was on the increase. By the end of the nineteenth century, opium-smoking had infiltrated into Hindu religious practices as a congregational ritual (*Kaniya-seva*). Long nocturnal sessions of opium-smoking parties at private houses, for purposes religious or otherwise, became a regular feature of the Assamese rural society.<sup>52</sup> The proportion of smokers amongst the addicts was believed to have increased from a 5 to 10 per cent around 1860 to some 50 per cent by 1913.

The Royal Commission's recommendations were disappointing. It did not feel that British India had any moral obligation to stop opium exports to China, as long as the latter country was permissive. It held that "the temperate use of opium in India should be viewed in the same light as the temperate use of alcohol in England." The Commission found the objectives and working of the opium monopoly legitimate and satisfactory.<sup>53</sup>

From 1905 onwards organized efforts to discuss the opium evil, alongside of other issues, began to take shape; but the emphasis was still on temperance, not on a policy of total prohibition. The Assam Association, the first valley-wise political platform of the Assamese middle classes, did not fail to discuss the issue at its very first annual conference held at Dibrugarh in 1905.<sup>54</sup> In 1907 an anti-opium

51 "Conditions of the people of Assam—No. 10", pp. 1-92, Government of India, *Proceedings of the Revenue and Agricultural Department for December 1888. Famine Reports on the Condition of the Lower Classes of Population in India* (Confidential), NAI.

52 *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into Certain Aspects of Opium and Ganja Consumption* (Botham Committee, 1913), pp. 2-3.

53 Cited in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, n.30, pp. 245-6.

54 Editorial of *Asamiya* (Assamese weekly, Dibrugarh), 29 July 1923. Records of the Association are not extant; hence details are not available.

conference was held in the same town, at the initiative of local social workers. It urged upon the Government to check the opium menace and recommended formation of an all-Assam temperance association. Such an association was finally formed in 1912 at the second anti-opium conference at Dibrugarh, with the Vaishnava abbot of the Dinjay Satra in the chair. It recommended introduction of a public register of opium addicts with a view to check further progress of the habit, as had been done in Burma.<sup>55</sup>

The provincial legislature—Assam had the benefit of one only since 1906—was another platform where the opium issue was raised from time to time. Padmanath Gohain-Barua, e.g., pleaded on its floor for opening a public register for the province's opium addicts. But such voices in the European-dominated legislature, during the years 1906-1920, were always subdued in tone and the least effective. Government members got away with their explanation of the rising trend in opium consumption in terms of a rapid population growth and increasing purchasing power. They argued that a severer restrictive policy would only force the addicts to opt for other competing narcotics like *ganja*.<sup>56</sup> Never were they ashamed of harping on the old theme that opium was harmless and even disease-resistant, if used moderately. Had there been no simultaneous international pressure on the Government of India, many of the criticisms made in the legislature would have remained unheeded. Through its participation in the Hague Convention on Opium in 1912, India became morally committed to suppressing opium-smoking in all its provinces. But the Government of India proceeded to fulfil its commitment only perfunctorily. On its advice, the Government of Assam constituted a committee with three Assamese members and A. W. Botham as its Chairman, to investigate the issue in its entirety.<sup>57</sup>

Having examined 482 witnesses from all over Assam proper, the Committee concluded that severe restrictions on opium would not solve the problem but would only increase the sale of other narcotics at its cost. In its view, there was no need for compulsory registration of

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55 *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report*, n.12, p. 142; Dilip Chaudhuri, *Nilmali Phukanar Cintadhara* (in Assamese, Gauhati 1972), p. 16.

56 Speeches by P. Gohain-Barua and Major W. M. Kennedy, *Assam Legislative Council Proceedings*, 10 April 1913, pp. 72 and 106; also speeches by P. G. Melitus, *East Bengal and Assam Legislative Council Proceedings*, 6 April 1909, p. 80 and *ibid*, 5 April 1910, p. 95.

57 Botham Committee, n.52, pp. 1-23. The Assamese members were—Kali Prasad Chaliha, Radhanath Phukan and Kutubuddin Ahmed.

opium-eaters, nor of banning opium-smoking altogether. All that was needed was legislation to raise the retail price of opium to Rs. 60 per seer (that too only in the two districts of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar); to put a ceiling on the quantity of opium permissible in private possession; to raise the qualifying age of opium-purchasers to 20 and to prohibit opium-smoking in company (e.g., *Kania-seva*). These measures, readily accepted though by the Government, were a total failure. The inroads of opium into the Assamese rural society went unhindered.<sup>58</sup>

### *Nationalist Challenge : Non-cooperation and Disobedience*

Under the circumstances, even the otherwise docile legislature became animated over the opium question, with the approach of the new era of nationalism under Gandhi's inspiration since 1915. In April 1919, Phanidhar Chaliha—a Rai Bahadur and retired government servant elected to the legislature—told the house that “. . . if the opium trade is retained, the Assamese race will be almost extinct within two hundred years thence”. Pointing out to increased smuggling, he argued that nothing short of a total prohibition would do. He also referred to the excise revenue as “tainted” money. The Chief Commissioner and ex-officio president of the house retorted that Chaliha should then return to Government all that tainted money he had so far earned as a public servant.<sup>59</sup> As a sequel to this altercation, his resignation from the Council followed.

In December 1919, the annual conference of the Assam Association at Barpeta passed a resolution recommending complete eradication of the opium trade within the next ten years. In a follow-up action, Ghanashyam Barua moved a resolution in the Assam Legislative Council in 1920 for compulsory registration of all opium addicts of Assam proper and also to take a count of them at the time of the next population census. Even this harmless resolution was thrown out by the European-dominated house.<sup>60</sup>

While other leaders of Assam made a break with their long moderate tradition at this juncture and boycotted the first elections

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58 Ibid.

59 Chaliha's speech on the budget and the Chief Commissioner's comment from the chair, *Assam Legislative Council Proceedings*, 5 April 1919, pp. 64-65 and 90.

60 *Assam Legislative Council Proceedings*, 8 April 1920, pp. 92-100.

held under the Act of 1919, Ghanashyam collaborated with the rulers and emerged as a minister under the Dyarchy. On the other hand, the Assam Association underwent a process of radicalization and finally went into voluntary liquidation to make room for the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee that was born on 5 June 1921. It was under the latter's leadership that the anti-opium agitation attained remarkable success within 10-15 years. Gandhiji was at its helm.<sup>61</sup>

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61 For details of the nationalist challenge to Opium see *Planter Raj to Swaraj : Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam in 1826-1947* (Indian Council of Historical Research, Delhi, 1977).



## APPENDIX—1

*Opium Statistics of Assam : Select Years*

| Year    | ASSAM PROPER    |                           |   | ASSAM PROVINCE<br>(INCLUDING MANIPUR) |                      |                                |
|---------|-----------------|---------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
|         | No. of<br>Shops | Consump-<br>tion<br>(mds) | Wholesale<br>Price<br>(Rs.<br>per seer) | No. of<br>Shops                       | Consumption<br>(mds) | Opium<br>Revenue<br>(Rs. 1000) |
| 1875-76 | 2740            | 1689                      | —                                       | 3151                                  | 1874                 | 1225                           |
| 1878-79 | 1116            | 1520                      | 24                                      | 1342                                  | 1655                 | 1561                           |
| 1879-80 | 1152            | 1481                      | 26                                      | 1367                                  | 1619                 | 1584                           |
| 1880-81 | 1179            | 1557                      | „                                       | 1397                                  | 1686                 | 1638                           |
| 1881-82 | 1179            | 1464                      | „                                       | 1404                                  | 1583                 | 1554                           |
| 1890-91 | 829             | 1208                      | 37                                      | 946                                   | 1308                 | 1812                           |
| 1891-92 | 843             | 1272                      | „                                       | 953                                   | 1370                 | 1916                           |
| 1897-98 | 662             | 1128                      | „                                       | 758                                   | 1228                 | 1723                           |
| 1900-01 | 674             | 1201                      | „                                       | 761                                   | 1291                 | 1804                           |
| 1901-02 | 685             | 1126                      | „                                       | 775                                   | 1228                 | 1723                           |
| 1905-06 | 657             | 1321                      | „                                       | 728                                   | 1415                 | 1982                           |
| 1908-09 | 427             | 1499                      | „                                       | 495                                   | 1640                 | 2353                           |
| 1909-10 | 381             | 1398                      | 40                                      | 443                                   | 1540                 | 2367                           |
| 1910-11 | 355             | 1391                      | „                                       | 416                                   | 1512                 | 2462                           |
| 1911-12 | 347             | 1394                      | „                                       | 409                                   | 1507                 | 2522                           |
| 1919-20 | 279             | 1640                      | 50                                      | 324                                   | 1748                 | 3837                           |
| 1920-21 | 272             | 1519                      | 57                                      | 315                                   | 1615                 | 4412                           |
| 1921-22 | 264             | 967                       | 65                                      | 306                                   | 1048                 | 3917                           |
| 1939-40 | 179             | 68                        | 95                                      | 217                                   | 94                   | 520                            |

Source : Collated from *Annual Reports* of the Excise Dept., Govt. of Assam ; *Excise Statistical Tables for the Province of Assam* (Shillong, 1927), pp. 96-97 ; official data cited in *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report* (Jorhat, 1925), pp. 23-4, 45 and 91. In the case of some figures, sources do not tally ; but the relevant discrepancies, not being significant, are overlooked.

The supply of opium to the State of Manipur which had only one shop was marginal, e.g. hardly 5 mds in 1920-21, and later much less. It appears that opium was introduced there only in the 20th century through the British Political Agency.

## APPENDIX—2

*Opium Revenue and Consumption in Assam : Index*

|  | 1880-81 | 1890-91 | 1900-01 | 1910-11 | 1919-20 | 1920-21 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total Opium Revenue<br>(Index No.)                                 | 100     | 110     | 110     | 152     | 234     | 270     |
| Wholesale Price per unit<br>of opium (Index No.)                   | 100     | 142     | 142     | 154     | 192     | 219     |
| Total Opium consumption<br>in the province<br>(Index No.)          | 100     | 78      | 77      | 90      | 104     | 96      |
| Total Opium consumption<br>in Assam Proper<br>(Index No.)          | 100     | 78      | 77      | 89      | 105     | 98      |
| Consumption per 10,000<br>people in the province<br>(seers)        | 137.4   | 95.5    | 88.4    | 89.7    | —       | 84.9    |
| Consumption per 10,000<br>people in Assam<br>Proper* (seers)       | 345.0   | 233.8   | 222.2   | —       | —       | 199.2   |
| Consumption per 10,000<br>of Indigenous Assamese<br>People (seers) | 313.4   | 267.2   | 274.9   | 277.1   | —       | 286.9   |

\*Includes Sadiya-Balipara Frontier Tracts (plains portion).

Source : The set of figures in the last row are reproduced from *Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report* (Jornat, 1925), p. 97. The basis of calculation is not known except that all people speaking Assamese and tribal languages in the Brahmaputra Valley (mostly in Assam Proper) were listed as indigenous.

The rest of the figures are worked out from official sources. The nearest census figures for Assam (excluding Manipur) have been used as deflators to arrive at per capita (10,000 people) figures, although the revenue and consumption figures include Manipur. The resultant distortion however is negligible and may be safely overlooked.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *North Indian Social Life during Mughal Period*

By P. N. Ojha—Oriental Publishers and Distributors 1975—

Price Rs. 45/-

The present volume has emerged out of proof Ojha's doctoral thesis. It gives an account of some aspects of North Indian Social Life from the time of Akbar to that of Aurangzeb. As the title indicates, South India is excluded from the study. To divorce politics from the history of any time is difficult no doubt, but the present author has deliberately avoided scrutinising the impact of politics on the evolution of Northern Indian Society during the period under review. He has put emphasis on the various facets of the society as it stood at that time. The author has rightly pointed out the limitations of Persian chronicles and foreign travellers' accounts as source-materials. He has rather put much premium on contemporary and near contemporary literature for constructing the social history of India and well that he has done so. Literature is surely the mirror of the age in which it flourishes. A poet or a novelist is bound to be influenced by the ideas and facts of contemporary life and the influence is reflected through his writings. Hence for a study of Social or Cultural life of the people, the study of contemporary literature is indispensable. This book is based on important literary works in Hindi, Bengali, Oriya and Maithili. But Urdu literature and Ahom Buranjis appear to have been left out by the author, although these two classes of literatures throw certainly a flood of light on the contemporary Society. For understanding the position of the Muslim Society, Urdu literature as source material is indispensable. Again, while referring to social life of the Bengalis Hindus and Muslims—the Mangal Kavyas (Manasa Mangal and Chandi Mangal particularly) do not appear to have been critically investigated by the author, although these two types of Kavya literature throw important light on the social trends.

However, a few short-comings can not mar the importance of the present work. It is divided into five chapters viz., food and housing; dress, toilets and ornaments; games, sports and festivals; education and learning and social status of women. The author has tried his best to draw a picture of the common people besides the kings and the aristocrats and herein lies the importance of the book. ofcourse, paucity of materials seems to have handicapped the author in providing minute details of the life of the common people. But certainly he has given a direction to the future researchers.

A. C. RAY.

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